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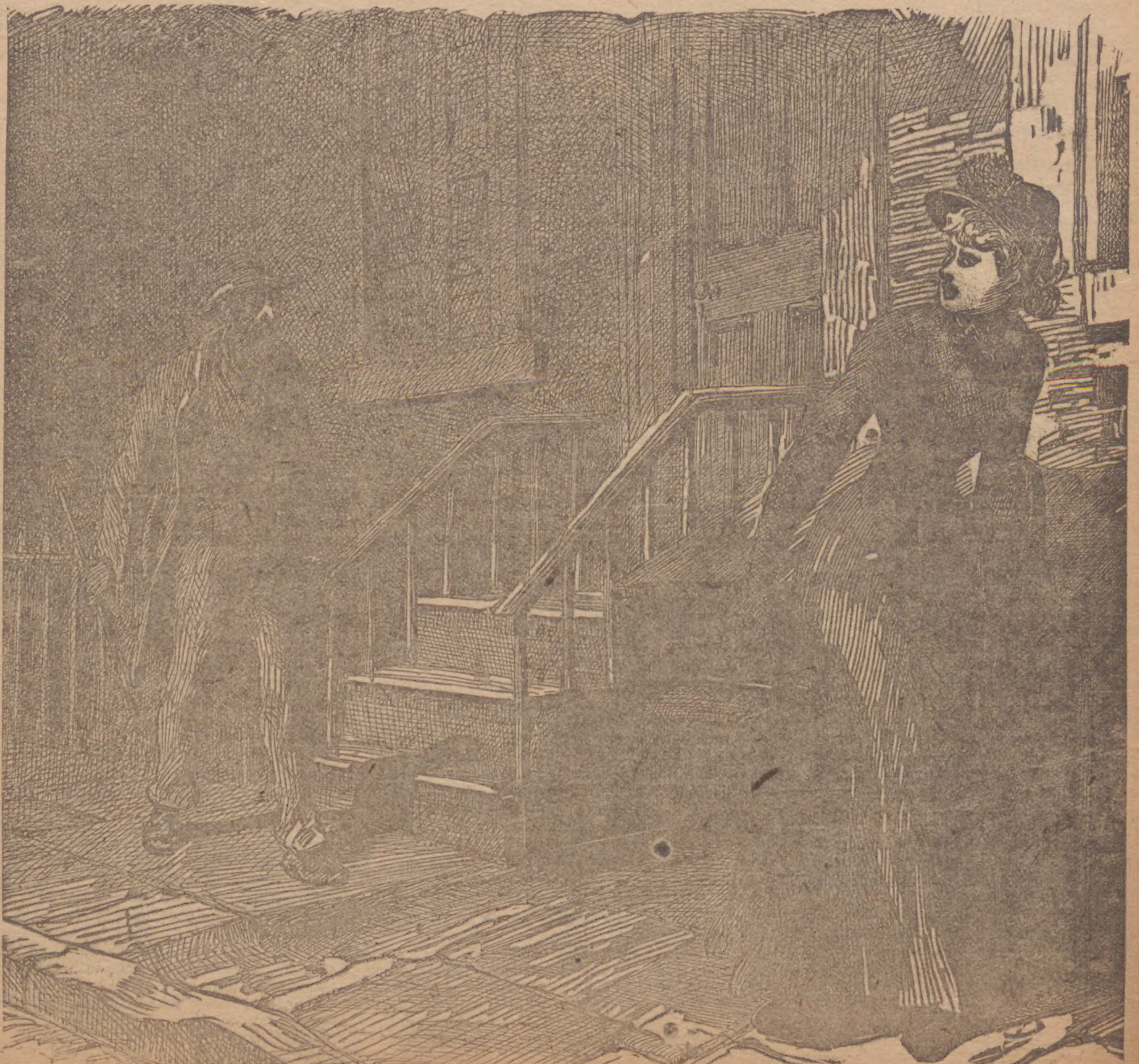
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The Sport From Denver.

BY J. C. COWDRICK.



SHE SCURRIED THROUGH ONE OF DENVER'S DARKEST STREETS, A ROUGH-LOOKING MAN PERSISTENTLY FOLLOWING HER.

The Sport from Denver;

OR,

COOL JOHN'S TUG WITH THE CITY SHARPS AND SHARKS

A Tale of Denver and New York.

BY J. C. COWDRICK.

CHAPTER I.

DARK THE DEED.

DENVER, Colorado, was wrapt in darkness.

The hour was late; heavy clouds hid the stars, and lightning and thunder presaged an imminent storm.

Particularly dark and forbidding, at such a time, were the grounds around one of the handsomest of Denver's suburban mansions, the residence of Roger King, the banker.

A young man was hastening in the direction of this place.

He was a sturdy, handsome fellow, about twenty-three years of age, as an occasional lightning-flash revealed.

His face was beardless, his eyes dark and keen, and he walked with a quick, springy step that betokened the athletic limb. On reaching these grounds he wheeled and entered.

It was Philip King, Roger King's son.

For a little distance he proceeded up the broad walk toward the front entrance of the house.

Then he turned aside into a narrower path that wound in and out among the bushes, finally curving toward the house at the extreme end of an L.

The house was of stone, with large, low windows consisting of one plate of glass in each sash, and the lower half of one of these windows, the one nearest the curve of the walk, was wide open.

Leaving the path, the young man strode across the grass in the direction of this window.

On his right was a clump of bushes, thick and Stygian.

He was within three paces of the window, when, suddenly, there was a bright flash in the black square.

Simultaneously with the flash came a deafening crash of thunder, and no report of the murderous pistol was heard, but the bullet had done its dreadful work nevertheless.

Immediately following the crash there was an almost blinding display of lightning, lasting for some seconds, and it revealed a thrilling tableau.

A man had sprung out of the clump of bushes, had seized the young man and forced him to the ground, with one hand at his throat; while in the window, peculiarly lighted by the blinding glare, was seen the hand of a woman with a revolver in its grasp.

This only for a few brief seconds; then darkness closed down ten times denser than before, seemingly.

No sound was heard, save that of a approaching wind, and nothing could be seen, absolutely nothing. A minute passed, and then came another crash and blinding glare, and the storm broke in fury.

The light was but momentary, but it was sufficient to show a change in the scene of the minute before. The window was now closed, and hand and revolver were absent. The young man lay on the ground, just where he had been thrown, on his back, his face turned to the left, and his hat lying a few feet away.

The other man was gone.

The rain descended in torrents, the thunder rolled, the lightning flashed, and the wind seemed as if determined to carry everything before it.

Half an hour of this, and then the storm lulled as suddenly as it had begun. It had passed. One by one the stars came out, as the clouds rolled away, and finally the sky was clear; and the night grew on apace.

CHAPTER II.

THE DISCOVERY MADE.

ROGER KING was awakened at an early hour.

There came a rude pounding upon the

door of his bedchamber, and the banker sprang up in alarm.

It was earlier by two hours than he was accustomed to rising, and as soon as he glanced at the clock on the mantel something like anger seized him.

Meanwhile the knocking was continued, and the banker's wife, in an adjoining room, the door of which stood open, sprang out of bed and ran into her husband's apartment before the banker answered.

"Roger, why don't you answer?" she asked. "What can be the matter?"

"What in the mischief is the matter?" the banker now blurted out. "Who is there? What's wanted?"

"It is I, Hooker, sir!" answered the tremulous, frightened voice of the butler. "Hurry and get up, sir. Your son has been murdered!"

The banker's wife uttered a scream.

"Murdered?" repeated the banker, in a dazed sort of way. "What does he mean, Myra?"

"Heavens, Roger, it must be that Phil has been killed!" the woman exclaimed. "Come, make haste and dress yourself."

She ran to the door and opened it on a crack.

"What is it, Peter?" she asked. "You do not mean to say that Phil is dead, do you?"

"That is it, Mrs. King. He is lying on the grass at the end of the extension, with a bullet-hole in his breast. My God! it is terrible."

"My son dead, my son murdered?" mumbled the banker, trying to collect himself. "I cannot realize it. I will be down immediately, Hooker." more like himself. "Let nothing be disturbed."

"All right, sir."

The butler hurried away, and the woman closed the door.

"Who can have done so terrible a deed?" muttered Mrs. King, wringing her hands.

"That remains to be seen, Myra," answered the banker, making haste to dress himself. "Get ready and come down as soon as you can."

"I am so upset by the shock that I can hardly do anything. Who can have killed poor Phil? Some evil companion who has had a grudge against him, I have no doubt."

"Evil companion?"

"You know his company has been none of the best."

"Perhaps not; but I was not aware that he was associating with murderers. I am not willing to believe it."

"Well, some one has done it, if what Peter reports is true. Phil has been very lax in his habits, remaining out late at night, and often not coming in at all. I have feared something would happen."

"His mother's blood! his mother's blood! But, get to your room and dress, for this is no time to parley."

The banker spoke firmly, yet not unkindly.

"I only wish I could take it as coolly as you," the wife muttered, as she left the room.

"And I wish that I could feel the coolness that I have to assume," returned the banker. "This is terrible. I am almost overcome. Poor Phil, poor Phil! Who can have done it?"

Roger King was a man close upon sixty years of age.

He wore his years lightly, however, and was hale, hearty and robust. When on the street he did not look a day over fifty.

Making all haste, he was soon dressed, and by that time had overcome the shock and his emotion, and was himself—the calm, iron-willed banker, apparently as hard and stern as a rock.

Leaving the room, he ran lightly down the stairs.

In the lower hall was a beautiful girl, hurriedly attired, who stood wringing her hands.

"Oh! papa! what has happened?" she cried, her eyes dilated and her manner frightened. "Tell me it is not true, oh! tell me it is not true!"

"Calm yourself, Rosa," was the response. "Perhaps you had better remain in the house."

"No, no, I could not do that! Where is mamma?"

"Coming."

Roger King had not stopped, but passed right out the door and turned toward the end of the L.

There he saw the butler, the coachman, and the other servants congregated, and a dark, suggestive form was lying on the ground.

The old man choked down a sob and ran forward through the wet grass, and coming to the spot where the body of his son was lying, he stooped and laid a hand on the dead face.

He uttered a moan.

As soon as he could control his voice he arose, asking:

"Have you telephoned to the police, Hooker?"

"No, sir, not yet."

"Do so at once. Tell them to send a couple of their best detectives. Meantime, let not a thing be touched. This matter shall be sifted to the bottom."

"Here is something I found, sir," and the butler was holding something in his fingers, which the banker at once took.

It was a charm, a locket in the form of a horseshoe, one side set with precious stones and on the other two initials—J. H.—in monogram.

The banker touched the spring and opened the locket, and the instant he did so his face paled. There were the likenesses of his daughter, Rosa, and a young man, a sport-about-town, whom he had often seen on the street. What did it mean?

CHAPTER III.

MYSTERY DEEPENED.

THE servants were watching their master's face—all wondering what had caused his sudden paleness—all save the butler, perhaps.

Quite likely the butler had looked into the locket on finding it, if he had had opportunity; but, that is of no moment.

"Where did you find it, Hooker?" the banker asked.

"Right here beside the body, sir," was the response.

Roger King looked searchingly around, before speaking.

"There were no tracks?" he asked.

"Not a sign, sir. You see, the rain has washed everything out. There is the spot where the locket lay."

He pointed to an imprint in the ground close beside the body, and it seemed plain that the locket had been stepped on after being dropped.

At that moment the banker's wife and daughter came running to the scene, and the instant they came up the banker seized his daughter by the arm, held the open locket before her eyes, and demanded:

"What is the meaning of this?"

The handsome girl gave a gasp and staggered backward, her face like death.

"What is the meaning of it, I ask you?" her father again demanded. "What is your likeness doing in this locket?"

"Her likeness?" spoke the girl's mother, wondering.

"Yes, her likeness! Look at it!" and Roger King held the locket so that his wife could see.

"And where did you get the locket, Roger?"

"It was found right there."

"Good heavens!"

Mrs. King, whose face was now as pale as that of her daughter, looked to her for an explanation.

"He did not do it," the girl managed to gasp, in a terrified way; "oh! he did not do it, mamma, papa," in intense earnestness; "he did not do it!"

"Who did not do it?" the banker thundered.

"He—that—that man."

"And who is he?"

"I have seen him before," declared Mrs. King, as her daughter hesitated.

"Yes, and so have I, more than once," cried the banker. "He is a fellow of questionable character and occupation, if I mistake not."

"He is an honest man," defended the girl, "and—and—"

"And what?"

But she kept silent.

"What is his name?" Roger King demanded.

"John Handy."

"Hah! I thought I was not mistaken. It is that sport around town, that dare-devil known as Cool John. Hooker, telephone as I ordered, and tell them to arrest that man straightway!"

"No, no, papa! He is innocent, he is innocent!"

"Silence!"

The butler hurried off to obey.

Rosa King buried her face in her hands, and partly turned aside.

Her mother looked at her, with a puzzled, wondering expression, while the banker glared at the locket.

"Tell me, young woman," he demanded, "how came your likeness in the hands of that fellow? Do you know him, since you have been so quick to defend him? Answer me, miss?"

The old banker's harshness stung his daughter to the quick. Never before had he addressed her as "young woman," and "miss."

"Yes, I know him," she answered.

"Oh! you do? Then answer my other question. Come, for the police will want all the information you can give them. John Handy was the murderer of my boy, and he lost the locket here—"

The young woman gave a gasp, a start.

"No, no," she interrupted, quickly. "You wrong him, papa, indeed you do! I had the locket, not he; it was he gave it to me!"

Her eyes were wild, her manner excited.

"Then how came it here?" her father demanded, severely.

"Alas! I do not know."

"And you have been deceiving us—your mother and me, have you? You have been living a lie before us? This nobody is your lover, is he? What excuse have you to offer for such conduct?"

"I love him."

"Hah! and you tell us to our faces, here in the presence of the dead?"

"I will make no attempt to deny it, papa. Do not blame me for what I cannot help. I do love him."

"Myra, do you hear?" the banker demanded, turning to his wife. "Do you understand how we have been deceived? I could almost believe there is Matson blood in her veins. I hate deception!"

His wife grew white, and for a moment she seemed to quail.

"Where did you meet this fellow, to make his acquaintance?" the banker further insisted, turning again to his child.

"Do you remember the time a man saved my life, when my horse ran away with me? Well, it was he, and I was very grateful to him, and—and—"

"And you told me you did not know who it was—"

"I did not, at the time."

"But you have learned since. I understand, the rascal! He presumed upon that favor to force himself upon you, and you have allowed him to win your affections. For shame!"

"The fault was mine, papa; do not blame him."

"What?"

"Let it pass for the present," here interposed Mrs. King. "We have something of more terrible importance to occupy our attention now."

"That is just it," cried the banker. "That is just what I am trying to get at. How came this locket here by the body of my murdered boy? By heavens! but the wretch who did this deed shall suffer!"

He thrust the locket into his pocket and paced up and down.

The servants, except the butler, still stood around, white-faced and terrified, exchanging now and then a whisper among themselves.

The butler came out.

"I have telephoned for the police," he announced.

"And may they make haste in getting out here," cried the banker. "By the way, does one of you know anything about this?"

He turned upon the servants, and they trembled.

"N—no," one managed to answer.

"Then away to your duties! Don't stand gaping here! But you, Hooker, and the coachman, remain."

The others lost no time in obeying the peremptory order and in getting away from the terrible spot, while the butler and the coachman stood by respectfully.

Rosa King paced up and down as before, and his wife and daughter stood near, appearing as if afraid to go and yet unwilling to remain, and they were still there when the police and detectives arrived.

There was one policeman in uniform, one police detective, and a private detective named Coughlin.

"Have you arrested John Handy?" were the first words of the banker.

"Men have been sent to find him," answered the police detective. "Have you proof that he did the deed?"

"Well, no, perhaps not, but I had a suspicion against him when I telephoned for you. Set to work, now, and see what you can do toward finding the murderer of my son."

"Then you have a clue which you are holding back?" asked Coughlin.

"Well, yes, for the present."

"And it points to John Handy, known as Cool John?"

"It certainly connects his name with the mystery, sir. I will explain at the proper time."

"Well, you have the right to withhold it, certainly; but, I would be willing to stake my life that John Handy is innocent of the crime."

"Oh! thank you, sir, for those words!"

All looked at Rosa.

"Besides," added the private detective, "I happen to know that Cool John and your son were good friends. He is a sport, but a man of sand, every inch, and a gentleman. No, sir, he never did this deed!"

"I am of the same opinion," asserted the police detective. "In fact, Cool John is something of a detective himself, and has more than once done good service in a quiet way here in Denver. The fact of the business is, Mr. King, your son was a wild lad, and Cool John has been the break that has kept him from going to the bad entirely, as I happen to know."

CHAPTER IV.

COMPLICATIONS ARISING

THE banker's brain was in a whirl.

He wanted time to think, time to decide what course to pursue.

These good opinions of John Handy, from the lips of such men, rather staggered him.

And, now that he thought of it, his daughter had lied to him, coolly and deliberately lied. He needed no further proof for that, now that he remembered.

She had told him that she had had the locket—that Handy had given it to her; but now he recollected that he had seen it dangling from the fellow's watch-chain only a day or two before!

Why had she sought to deceive him?

Her confessed love for the sport was the only reason he could imagine; but, perhaps that was sufficient.

And he was pained—ay, not only pained, but alarmed. He loved his child, loved her dearly; and he recalled that there had been but very little affection between her and Philip.

For the present he would hold back the locket.

He was sorry, now, that he had taken his daughter to task before all the servants.

"Well, you may be right, you may be right," he made rejoinder; "I hope you are. But, the guilty wretch must be brought forth and dealt with as he deserves. See what you can do."

"All right, sir; we will look around."

"Come," insisted the banker, to his wife and daughter, "let us go in. By the way, gentlemen, let the body remain right there until the arrival of the coroner. If he has not been notified, send for him immediately."

"We will attend to it, sir."

Rosa King then led the way into the house.

"Come in here," he said to his wife and daughter, opening the door of the library.

"We must have a plain understanding."

They followed him in, both very pale, and he closed the door.

"Sit down!" he ordered, himself taking his accustomed great-chair by a massive ma-

hogany table. "This will be our only chance for a talk, perhaps, before we have to testify."

They obeyed him, both trembling with excitement.

"Now, Rosa," he said, not unkindly, "I am going to ask you a few plain questions, and I expect truthful answers. From me you can expect mercy; from the coroner, none."

The girl's face was like death itself.

"I know you have lied to me once already," the father went on, "and—"

"Lied to you, father?"

"Yes, lied. You said this locket was in your possession, but I remember now that I saw it on that fellow's watch-chain only yesterday. Will you tell me now that he is innocent?"

With parted lips, eyes dilated, the young lady gazed at her father, speechless.

"You have declared before all the servants," the banker went on, "that this locket was in your possession, however, and if you stick to that, instead of admitting the truth, it may be made to look bad for you. It is no secret that you and Philip had no love for each other."

The girl gave forth a gasp that was almost a moan.

"What if you are accused of having murdered your half brother?" the father severely concluded.

With a cry that was almost a scream the girl threw herself upon her knees at his feet, clasped hands uplifted, and tears streaming from her eyes.

"Oh, papa! You do not—you cannot believe that of me! Perhaps I did not love Philip as I ought, but I would not have harmed him—indeed I would not! Oh, say that you do not think so."

"I do not believe you guilty of such a deed, my child; but, what if you are charged with the crime?"

"Impossible, papa. Who would think so evil of me as that?"

"The law is no respecter of persons, my daughter. You have made the statement that this locket was in your possession; it was found imbedded in the sod near Phil's dead body."

"I can say that I lost it—"

"Stop! I will hear no more lying. You are determined, I see, to shield that fellow. Do you think you can save him that way? To save yourself you have got to tell the truth, for I shall testify that I saw this charm on his chain only yesterday. Where will you stand then?"

"But he is innocent, papa, he is innocent, he is innocent!"

"Your saying so does not make him so. You admit, then, that you told me a falsehood about the locket?"

"Oh, papa, spare me; spare me!"

"I am willing to shield you all I can, my child, but the law will show you no mercy whatever. Confess the truth to me and your mother, and let us see what we can do toward helping you out of the dilemma into which your lie has placed you. Withhold nothing."

Mrs. King was scarcely less agitated than her daughter.

She looked from the one to the other, wildly, almost, and at her husband's last words tears sprung to her eyes.

"Yes, yes, tell us everything, Rosa," she falteringly supplemented. "Your father and I are your truest friends. Confide in us, and keep nothing back."

The young girl turned upon her mother with a look of surprise, momentary—a look which the banker did not fail to notice. Then she covered her face with her hands, sobbing:

"I cannot—oh, I cannot!"

Rosa King assumed a manner of great severity, now.

"Get up from your knees," he sternly ordered. "Let no one discover you in such a position at this time. Now, you have got to make a clean confession, or I myself will deliver you up to the authorities. I am your father, and I have promised to befriend you. Can you not trust me?"

"Shall I, mamma? Shall I? Oh! pray tell me what to do."

"Did you not hear what I just now said?" her mother demanded. "Tell us, certainly, everything."

"Then it is true, papa, that I did not have the locket: I know not how it came where it was found, but pray do not think John Handy guilty of such a terrible crime. I said what I did on the spur of the moment, fearful that suspicion might fall on him, for I knew the locket at sight."

"And you had given him your likeness?"

"Yes."

"Then it remains for him to explain how it came where it was found."

"He is innocent, papa, I know he is innocent; pray do not think him guilty of such a deed."

"How do you know he is innocent?"

"I know he could not do a thing like that; he is as gentle as a woman."

"Ptsch! If he is innocent, he will no doubt be able to prove himself so; if not, your excuse will never clear him."

"But, papa, I have not told you everything."

"What more, then?"

"Something I saw last night."

"What was it?"

"You have demanded that I tell everything, and now that I have retracted my first statement regarding the locket, I must do so."

The parents looked at their daughter in wonderment.

"It was just about the time the storm began," the young woman went on, "I looked out the window, and just as I did so there came a terrible glare of lightning, the worst I ever saw. You know the windows of the extension can be seen from my room. In the dark frame of the window under which poor Phil's body is now lying, I saw a woman's hand holding a pistol—"

"Mercy!" gasped the mother.

"Impossible!" cried the banker, excitedly.

"Papa, it is true; I swear that it is true," the girl insisted, most earnestly. "I never saw anything more plainly in all my life. It was a woman's hand holding a pistol, and the lightning playing upon the polished weapon made both hand and pistol appear as if aglow with fire. It was only for a moment, and then darkness shut out the sight. I waited, but when the next flash came the hand was gone and the window was closed. I saw nothing more."

"And you will swear to the truth of this?" asked the banker, himself almost atremble.

"Yes, papa, yes; by everything sacred I swear that it is true."

Husband and wife looked at each other, as if bewildered, and as the banker's cold, keen eyes met those of the woman, she grew suddenly paler, reeled on her chair, and fell to the floor in a faint.

CHAPTER V.

INQUEST AND VERDICT.

ROSA KING uttered a low, plaintive cry.

The banker voiced an ejaculation, and passed his hand across his forehead as if to clear his brain.

"It was not she, papa, oh! it was not she; it cannot have been my dear mamma. Oh, why was I led to reveal what I had seen! But, you cannot believe her guilty, papa."

Roger King looked at his daughter as if utterly dumfounded.

Then suddenly he roused himself, but his face was pale and drawn, and starting from his chair he seized his daughter's arm.

"Mind you, not a word of this are you to mention!" he exclaimed in her ear. "Of course she is innocent; but, what if this had happened in the presence of those detectives? If you love your mother—if you love me, breathe not one syllable of this to them."

At that moment there came a knock at the door.

The banker sprung to his wife, lifted her head, and then bade the applicant enter.

The chief of police entered the room, followed by the coroner, for the report of a murder in the household of Roger King had had the effect to bring them out to his residence in haste.

"Good heavens, Mr. King, what has been going on here?" the chief inquired.

"A terrible trouble has come upon us," calling the chief by name, for he knew him well. "My son has been murdered, and the shock has nearly killed my wife, I am afraid."

"It is awful, truly. You had better have

a doctor here. I will not bother you with questions until you have had time to pull yourself together, so to say."

At that moment Mrs. King opened her eyes.

"My God!" she gasped. "That hand of fire!"

"What's that she is saying?" asked the chief.

"She is out of her mind," returned the banker, hastily. "Kindly leave the room until we can get her quieted."

"Certainly, if you desire it."

The daughter was as pale as death, and stood silent, her hands tightly clinched, looking from one to another, and the chief of police cast a searching look at her.

He and the coroner moved toward the door.

"I did not dare to tell," Mrs. King muttered. "It was so terrible, and I was afraid to speak."

"Can't you tell where you are?" the banker quickly appealed. "It was only a dream; see, here is Rosa, and this is I. Try to think aright, Myra."

The chief and the coroner were moving all too slowly.

"Yes, yes, I know where I am," the woman responded, "but it was no dream; I saw it only too plainly. And I thought—I thought—oh, Rosa, how can you forgive me if I tell you what I thought?"

The two men had passed out and closed the door, and possibly had not heard what she said.

"Heavens!" exclaimed the banker. "What do you mean, Myra? Did you, too, see that hand?"

"Yes, yes, I saw it, Roger—I swear I saw it, too!"

"Then there can be no doubting the reality of the vision."

The woman essayed to rise, and her husband gave her his hand and assisted her upon her feet.

"Who can it have been, mamma?" the daughter asked.

"Heaven only knows, child," was the almost agonizing answer.

"See here, we must talk rapidly, and reach an understanding," now urged the banker.

"Did you see anything else, Myra?"

"No, that was all."

"Nor you, Rosa?"

"Nothing. You see, it was only a momentary vision, anyhow; and, then, the tall bushes concealed the ground where poor Phil was found. Oh! I am glad you saw it, too, mamma, for now we can prove John Handy innocent!"

"Hearken to me," said the banker, hoarsely. "This matter must not be breathed. Suspicion might fall upon one of you, and in the mean time the real murderer would get away. No, this evidence must be suppressed, for the present at any rate, until we have time to think well about it."

"But, papa, you will not allow that innocent man to be suspected?"

"If innocent, as you so strongly believe, he will no doubt easily prove himself so, my child."

"Yes, but the evidence against him, papa, think of that! There is the locket which he wore only yesterday, as you yourself declare; and what if it can be shown that he was out late—"

She stopped suddenly.

"He must defend himself, that is all," replied the banker, firmly. "Between an outsider and a member of my own household, I am against the outsider, every time; unless—"

"Unless what?" asked his wife, huskily.

"I was going to say, unless I had good reason to believe the member of my household really guilty, and in that case— But, thank Heaven! there is no room for any suspicion of that kind here."

A look of great relief came over the face of both mother and daughter, upon hearing these words.

"Papa is right, I suppose," said Rosa. "Still, papa, I will hold back nothing, if by telling I can prove John Handy innocent. My confession has been torn from me—that I love him, and he will find that I am ready to prove my love, if the occasion arise."

"Do nothing rashly, my child. Be guided by me. And now, both of you, to your rooms. I must confer with the officers."

He dismissed them, and seeing them go up-stairs, went out and joined the men who were endeavoring to get a clue to the terrible crime that had been committed.

The chief of police advanced to meet him.

"You telephoned for me to arrest John Handy," he observed, "and I have done so. What is the evidence against him?"

"Have you found any against him?" the banker counter-questioned.

"Well, he was out in the storm last night, as his clothes proved, for he was not up yet; and he is reticent concerning his whereabouts."

"Then it looks bad for him, certainly."

"Why so?"

"Do you know anything about a charm he has been in the habit of wearing on his chain?"

"Certainly, I know it well; would be able to recognize it anywhere, I think. But, what about it?"

"Is this it?"

"Yes, it certainly is. Where did you get it?"

The banker explained, and the chief looked concerned. He was silent.

He opened the locket, while meditating, but it contained nothing now. Roger King had removed the likenesses!

"It looks suspicious," the chief admitted.

"But John Handy never did the deed," declared Detective Coughlin promptly.

"That is what I say, too," the police detective supported. "Cool John never did this."

"I am inclined to the same opinion myself," assented the chief; "but here is some terrible evidence to the contrary."

And he explained to them what he had just told Mr. King.

They both looked troubled.

The body had now been carried into the house by the butler and coachman by the direction of the coroner.

The detectives had looked all around and about, but had been unable to discover even the faintest sign of a clue. It certainly did look dark for the suspected man.

In due time the inquest was held.

John Handy was there, a prisoner, of course; it could not have been otherwise.

He swore that he was innocent, and that he had no knowledge as to how the locket came to be where found. He would not explain where he had been during the time of the storm.

The butler testified to the discovery of the body, to the finding of the locket, and told how he had aroused the household. The other servants knew nothing; they had been instructed by their master to say nothing of what they had heard concerning the likenesses.

Mrs. King and her daughter were not called at all, since the banker himself had answered for them. And so it was that, since they could do nothing else, the jury brought in a verdict that Philip King had met his death at the hands of some person to the jury unknown, yet with sufficient evidence against John Handy upon which to hold him to answer for the crime.

CHAPTER VI.

WHO THE MURDERER? WHAT THE MOTIVE? DENVER was shocked.

By the time the matter became generally known, the inquest had been held and the accused man lodged in jail.

It was a surprise to all who knew anything about the two men—Phil King and John Handy—for they had been companions to some extent, and it was thought that they were firm friends.

There appeared no motive for the crime.

As the general public knew the case, it stood thus: Phil King found murdered; nothing taken from his person; John Handy's watch charm found near the body. Handy arrested; his revolver found suspiciously clean; he had been out in the storm; would give no account of his whereabouts.

It was a mystery to all, and even more of mystery to those who knew some of the inner facts than to the public generally; for those facts were inexplicable.

And we have privileged the reader to know more than any, save only the two persons chiefly concerned.

Who these persons were remains to be disclosed.

In the afternoon of the same day, a woman, closely veiled, evidently one of the servants, came forth from the rear of the King mansion and took a car into the city.

She did not once lift her veil, and left the car in one of the busiest parts of the city, hurrying down a diverging thoroughfare. She entered two or three stores and made purchases.

Coming forth from the last of these, she stood for some minutes on the sidewalk, looking up and down the street, as if in search of some particular person, it would seem; then she walked rapidly away, and, ere a great while, was in one of the quiet quarters.

Many times she had looked backward over her shoulder, as if fearful of being followed.

Finally she stopped at a certain house and rung the bell.

A servant-girl opened the door.

"I want to see Paul Batford," the caller announced.

"Your name, please?" was asked.

"Tell him it is his mother."

"Oh! then I am to show you right up, ma'am. He is expecting you."

The visitor entered, and the servant closing the door led the way up-stairs and tapped at a room.

The place had the appearance of a boarding-house, and not one of a strictly first-class order at that. A voice in the room immediately called out:

"Come in!"

The servant opened the door, and the veiled woman entered.

A man was there, a man somewhere between twenty-five and thirty years of age, a fellow with square chin and heavy mustache.

Neither spoke until the servant had closed the door and gone away, when the man said:

"Well, dear mamma, I see you got my letter—rather note."

The woman threw up her veil, disclosing the pale, anxious face of Myra King, the banker's wife!

"Yes, Paul, I received it," she answered, nervously. "Why in the world have you commanded me to come here at such a time as this? Have you not heard what has happened?"

The man smiled in a meaning way.

"Well, yes, I have heard something about it," he drawled. "It is just that that I want to talk with you about. By the way, you failed to keep your appointment with me last night, and it is only fair that I should put you to some trouble."

"I did not expect you in such threatening weather, and I did not go down to meet you. At midnight the rain was pouring in torrents."

"Yes, I happen to know that it was. Look at those clothes."

He pointed to a suit of clothes spread out to dry, and they certainly had been thoroughly drenched.

"What!" the woman exclaimed. "You do not mean to say you were out in the storm, do you? You do not mean to say that you were at the house at midnight, waiting for me?"

"I was there."

"If I had thought for a moment you would come, I would not have disappointed you."

"It seems you had other business on hand."

"What do you mean?"

"I witnessed the killing of Phil King, my dear mother."

The woman partly sprung from her chair, her face pale and eyes dilated, and she gasped:

"You—you did not kill him, I hope?"

"I? Well, now that is cool!"

"But, you know who did! Tell me, I pray, so that the terrible mystery can be brushed away and the innocent cleared from suspicion!"

The young man looked at her in amaze.

This only for a moment, however, and then he smiled knowingly.

"Pretty well done, dear mamma," he said, "but it will not work—not with me. I witnessed the killing, as I say, and I saw who killed him."

"Yes, but you do not tell me who it was."

Speak, for mercy's sake, and tell me who it was."

Now the man laughed.

"About as good as I ever saw," he declared; "but you can't hope to fool me, that way. I saw the person who fired the shot from the window, my mamma dear, and the person was you."

"My God!"

"You see I know all about it."

"No, no; it was not I! By all I hold sacred I swear it was not I."

"What is the use of your telling me that? Can you hope to make me doubt what I saw with my own eyes?"

"It is false, false! This is only a scheme of your own inventing to force further money out of me. Would to God the victim of that crime had been you, instead of Phil King!"

"Thank you, fond mamma! That shows the affection you have for your first-born. Will you tell me that I did not see you in the open window? That I did not see you lift your arm and fire the shot point-blank at Phil's breast? Will you attempt to deny that you did not see me?"

"Paul, I swear that I know nothing about it; will you not believe me?"

"In spite of the evidence of my own eyes? Well, hardly! A man must believe what he sees."

"But, it was not I, Paul; oh! Heavens! it was not I! I was not out of my own room, and I certainly did not see you; I did not expect you would come, as I have said. Cannot I convince you?"

"Well, I think you will find it pretty hard to do, mother mine. I am not a fool altogether, and what I saw I saw. You may just as well own up, and then we'll come to terms on the matter. My income has not been sufficient, from your other secret, and yet I have felt in duty bound to stick to our agreement."

"I could pay you no more money; it would be impossible."

"Nonsense! Roger King has got loads of it, and you must work him for a bigger allowance, somehow. You can do it, if you try."

"No, no; I cannot, I will not!"

"You will not? What if he knew your secret? What if the police knew who killed Phil King? It is not only your name and position at stake, now, but your very life as well."

"My God! Have mercy on me!"

"Certainly I will. Make my allowance two hundred dollars a month, instead of one hundred as heretofore, and you are safe."

"Impossible. Roger now considers me ruinously extravagant—and no wonder! and he certainly will not increase my allowance. Even as it is, my appearance does not accord with my income."

"Hal! there is your very chance, then!"

"What do you mean?"

"Convince him that you cannot keep yourself in appearance befitting your station, upon such a paltry sum, and make him come down with another hundred—"

"No, no, for that would only make my position the worse. How could I dress any better than now, if you stand ready to take it from me? I tell you it cannot be done, Paul. If you push me, you will drive me to take my life."

"Well, maybe I am too rough on you, dear mamma. I will compromise the matter with you. You pay me a hundred and fifty, and keep the other fifty for yourself. I will try to get along on that until the old fellow passes in his checks, and then we will cut for a new deal."

And Myra King, innocent of the crime thus laid to her charge, as innocent as was John Handy, was forced to submit.

Remembering the hand in the window, she believed it must have been Rosa, after all, who shot Phil; and if this man told what he declared was true, how could she disprove it?

But, Rosa King, too, was innocent.

Who, then, had done the deed? What the motive?

CHAPTER VII.

DETECTIVES NOT ASLEEP.

PAUL BATFORD gloated with satisfaction when the banker's wife acceded to his demand.

He had her in his power—she was in his power before, as we have seen—and she was helpless. But this was no scheme of his own inventing, as she had asserted; he believed it was true.

This man Batford, then, as the reader will have guessed, was the man who sprung out of the bushes and clutched Phil King by the throat as he reeled backward on being struck by the bullet. He saw the woman who fired the shot, and took her to be Mrs. King.

We have seen why he was hid there at that hour.

"You have chosen wisely, mamma dear," he said. "Now all will be well with you, for I will keep your secrets for the price stipulated."

"Would to God I had never had a secret!" the woman moaned, as if from a breaking heart.

"But you had, you see, and it happens that I'm the burden of it."

"You would not be, had I known—"

She spoke in whisper, hoarsely, fiercely.

"Yes, I have no doubt you would," said the fellow, as she stopped without finishing. "But you didn't, and hence you have to suffer for your little mistake."

"But, Paul, while you have forced me to your terms, provided that I am able to do as I have agreed, you are nevertheless mistaken. It was not I who shot Philip King—I swear it was not!"

"Well, that is immaterial, now."

"No, you are wrong. It is everything, if you are sure it was a woman who fired the fatal shot."

"Sure it was a woman? Of course, I am sure. How could I swear that it was you, if I had any doubts on that score? Was I not there? Did I not see it all? It was a woman."

"But, you know it was not I."

"On the contrary, I know it was you."

"I swear again that it was not. If you are not purposely lying, then you are laboring under a mistake."

"It does not run in the blood to lie, as you know full well, dear mother. If not you, then who was it?"

"I know not; if a woman, then it was not John Handy!"

"Certainly not."

"And he ought to be cleared."

"Do you feel like going and taking his place?"

"I would do so, were I guilty, rather than have him suffer for my crime."

"That is a pretty good resolve, but I am afraid you would back out when it came to the pinch."

"As I am innocent, it will not have to be tested; but you, if you allow him to hang, knowing what you do, will be guilty of his blood. Can you accept that, for a price?"

"Ha, ha! What would you have me do? Put the rope around the neck of my own mother?"

"No, for I am innocent, but I would have you ferret out the truth and put the crime where it belongs. Can you not do that?"

"I am not trying it. In such matters, the further away one keeps himself the better. I will leave all that for the detectives to accomplish—if they are smart enough."

"What if I undertake to do it myself?"

"You dare not!"

"Do not be too sure of it."

"I will believe it when I see it, not before. But, that aside, have you the needful with you?"

"Yes, the sum I had for you last night, and which you might have had, had I for a moment thought you would try to keep the appointment in such weather. Here it is."

She took a roll of bills from her pocket and handed it to him.

He took it greedily enough.

"It must be fifty more, next time, don't forget. You are responsible for my being in the world, and I must hold you accountable for my keep."

"You are utterly heartless," she said, sadly.

"Oh, no; I am very honorable, I pride myself. Not going so soon?"

She had risen from her chair, with something of a shudder, as if eager to get away from his presence.

"Yes, I am going," she said lightly.

never want to see your face again, and I never will, if I can help it. Inquire at the post-office, monthly. I will do as I have agreed as long as I can, or as long as I care to live."

She opened the door.

"One moment."

"Speak."

"Let this be the monthly date. I will give you two days' grace each month. When you fail me, then I call upon Roger King. Good-day, madam!"

She left the room without speaking again, descended the stairs, passed out, and was gone.

It had been a strange interview, and it had revealed much.

When she was gone Paul Batford paced the floor in a puzzled manner, trying to solve an enigma.

"Is it possible that I was mistaken?" he asked himself. "Her earnestness almost made me believe her innocent, as she declares. But, confound it! did I not see it all with my own eyes? What more do I want than that? She is in my power, and she knows it. But I must take care not to step over the danger-line. If King would only die, then all would be well with us."

He continued pacing up and down for a considerable time, till finally he flung himself on a chair and lighted a cigar.

"I give it up," he muttered. "If she did do it, what was her motive? And if she did not do it, then who did? The person, whoever it was, undoubtedly saw me, and it is lucky for me that I got away from the place quickly. It will not do for the police to get onto the fact that I was there, or they may make it interesting for me. There is only one other thing I have to dread, and that is that she will wake up to the fact that she has it in her power to shake me off."

The woman, meantime, had made her way back again to the busier part of the town, and there she took a car for home.

When she reached her destination, she entered the house by the front way, and met her husband in the front hall.

"Where have you been?" he demanded, "and in such attire as that!"

"Let these purchases explain, Roger," she answered, exhibiting the parcels she carried.

"What is it?"

"It is black, for mourning, such as I was able to buy."

"Such as you were able to buy? What do you mean by that? And why did you go out secretly?"

"What I mean is, that my means do not allow me much choice. You have no conception of a woman's needs. And I went out as a servant might go, because I did not want to be known."

"Well, well! this thing can be remedied. But, you did a foolish thing, going out that way, and you have given one of the detectives no end of unnecessary work, no doubt."

"One of the detectives?" with a gasp.

"Yes; Detective Coughlin followed you! But, what is the matter?"

She had grown suddenly pale; she reeled, and must have fallen but for getting hold of a chair.

"I—I am tired out," she explained—"that and the excitement together."

"Well, get to your room then, and rest."

Banker King had been pacing up and down the hall, and he continued to do so after she left him.

"I don't understand it," he muttered to himself, as he had said a score of times. "I don't understand it. My wife and daughter both out of the house mysteriously, at such a time as this? They must be mad, in spite of the caution I gave them, to do such a thing!"

While thus occupied the door opened, and Detective Coughlin came into the hall, silently.

He stepped to Mr. King's private room on the left, motioning the banker to follow.

"What is it?" the banker asked.

"You are aware that your wife has been into the city?"

"Yes; she went to make a few purchases in the way of mourning, and, not wanting to be recognized, did not take the carriage."

"Not wanting to be recognized—exactly! Now, sir, can you tell me what business she

could possibly have with a fellow named Paul Batford, living down on B—street?"

The banker looked at the man in amazement, and felt himself turning pale—if such a statement can be accepted. Pale he certainly was, and beads of perspiration began to form on his forehead.

His wife in such a quarter as that; what was the man talking about!

And Paul Batford—who was he?

CHAPTER VIII.

MORE MYSTERY STILL.

It was some minutes before Banker King could speak.

The detective eyed him calmly and critically, perhaps with not a little of suspicion withheld.

"You—you do not mean to tell me that my wife has been to such a place, do you?" the old gentleman finally demanded. "Is there not some mistake?"

"Detectives sometimes make mistakes, sir, but there is no mistake about this, I assure you. Your wife did some shopping, as a blind; but her errand out was to go to that place."

"And to meet a man?"

"She went there to meet Paul Batford."

"And who is he?"

"A man about town; a fellow of very questionable reputation. I'd forty times sooner think him guilty of the murder of your son, than John Handy."

The banker was wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

"Do you know something about it?" the detective demanded. "Are you not holding something back from me?" and he scrutinized the other severely.

"I—know nothing about it; it is all a revelation to me, sir."

"The reason I asked, it seems to have thrown you into a state of consternation, judging by your emotions. If you are holding anything back, you cannot hope to blind me long, Mr. King, for now we surely shall get at the truth."

"Think you that you could appear more calm, in my place? My son murdered, my daughter—my wife's good name being brought into question; it is almost enough to deprive me of my reason, sir!"

"What were you about to say of your daughter?"

"Nothing."

"Perhaps her likeness and that of John Handy were found in that locket when it was first discovered, and

"Good God! How did you learn that?"

"What do you suppose I am working on this case for? I tell you again that you cannot hope to blind us long, Mr. King."

The banker had sunk down upon a chair.

"It is my own fault," he muttered. "I was wrong to make that discovery known in the presence of the servants. But, sir, you cannot possibly connect my wife or my daughter with the crime; I defy you to do that."

"I am glad to see the confidence you have in them, sir, and I hope it will be as you declare. Both, however, have claimed our attention, and their strange actions must be explained away. Are you aware where your daughter has gone? You see I know of her absence from the house."

"I know not."

"She has gone to the jail to see Handy."

"It is as I feared."

"You suspected that she had gone there, then? Well, you had good grounds."

"But, you cannot suspect my child. She foolishly loves the man, since he saved her life some time ago, a secret she had been keeping from me."

"And you removed the likenesses from the locket in order that this might not become known?"

"I did."

"Why?"

"The reason is simple; I did not want my daughter's name mixed up in it."

"Well, you made a mistake. Of course, you had to act upon impulse, in the time of excitement, but it is always better in such cases to let the truth right out, where you feel positive of innocence."

"And God knows I feel positive of it here."

"So do I, so far as Cool John is con-

cerned, and perhaps your daughter; but your wife—"

"Heavens! you would not hint to me that she murdered my son? She, who has been my trusted companion these twenty years!"

"I was going to say that she will have to account for her conduct."

"And I believe she can, and will."

"Very well; if she can do so satisfactorily, that will be sufficient. If not, I must search out the explanation."

"I will summon her."

It was not necessary to do that, for the door was thrown open and Myra King rushed in, throwing herself upon her knees at her husband's feet.

"I was listening—I have heard all," she sobbed. "Roger, I am as innocent of the blood of your son as you are yourself; on bended knees I swear it! But do not press me to explain."

"Madam, you must explain," and the detective spoke peremptorily.

"I cannot, I dare not! I will die first! Do not make me desperate," she urged pitifully.

The banker's face was like death, almost, as he looked upon his wife, and he clutched her arm.

"Myra," he said hoarsely, "what is the meaning of this? Explain at once."

"I cannot tell you, Roger! indeed I cannot!"

"You must—you shall!"

"No, no! It is impossible. I will die before I will explain."

"Madam, you are standing in your own light," spoke the detective, kindly. "Nothing can save you but the truth, if you are innocent."

"Heavens! Do you hold that I am guilty of the murder?"

"The appearances against you are tenfold more damning than they are against John Handy, that I can say, now."

"Well, arrest me and free him! I will not complain. But, I swear that I am innocent; but, reveal my secret—I never will; no, never."

The banker and the detective looked at each other, and the expression upon the old man's face was one of complete bewilderment. That of the detective was not easy of definition; it was doubt, determination, anger mixed.

Roger King uttered a moan, and released his wife's arm.

He covered his eyes with his hand, his elbow resting on the arm of the chair in which he sat.

She fell back to a sitting posture, burying her face in her hands, and sobs shook her frame, while tears—hot tears—dropped upon her dress.

The resolute detective looked sadly on, for the Coughlin man had a soft heart.

"Madam," he said, after a moment, "you may just as well tell everything. A man has been sent to arrest Paul Batford, and he will reveal—"

"No, no, he dares not! and if I had only thought of that sooner!"

"Do you mean that Paul Batford killed Phil King?" quickly asked the detective.

"No! no! not that; he could not do such a crime!"

"But, your words can be taken to mean that he did do it!" was urged.

"No, no; he is as innocent of the crime as am I, or at any rate so far as I know."

"Then he knows who killed him?"

"He does not, for to me he accused one whom I know to be innocent."

"And who was that one?"

"I will not tell."

"Your daughter?"

The woman kept silent.

"Well, it does not matter," said Coughlin. "We shall soon have the matter from Batford himself."

"I do not believe he will tell," averred the woman, hurriedly. "I do not believe he dares tell! Oh! that I had thought of this point before ever I went to see him—fool that I was!"

"Myra," now spoke the banker, kindly, "tell me what all this means."

"Roger, that I cannot do. It were better that you never know. You would, it might be, curse me for telling."

"Woman, are you mad?"

"The wonder is that I am not. My God!

how I have suffered! Only my love for you, for my home, and for my child, Roger, has enabled me to endure my life."

"Myra, for Heaven's sake, tell me all. What is it you mean?"

"No, no; do not ask it. Detective, arrest me if you are going to do so; otherwise let me go to my room."

"Go to your room."

The woman reached forward, took her husband's hand and kissed it—much as a dog might have licked it, so abject her bearing; that done, rose immediately and groped from the room.

"My God!" gasped the banker, "what does it mean—what can it mean?"

"That remains to be seen, sir," answered the detective. "We shall get it all out of the man Batford, I have no doubt."

"But she said she did not believe he would dare to tell. Can it be that he is the one who killed Phil? But, if so, what can he be to my wife, that she should try to shield him? Great heavens! what can the secret be?"

"We shall know, ere long, sir," assured the detective. "It is developing faster than any other case I ever took hold of in my life, but at every turn the mystery seems to grow more complicated. The strange part is, there is still no motive in sight."

CHAPTER IX.

A CLEVER TRICK NEATLY PLAYED.

LET us return to the boarding-house to which the banker's wife had paid the mysterious visit.

Paul Batford had not finished his cigar when there came a ring at the bell, and a few minutes later there came another tap at his door.

He sprung up in surprise, for his callers were few and far between. In fact, he seldom or never had one except by appointment, and it was certain that he had made no other appointment.

He opened the door, and the servant stepped back and allowed the visitor to speak for himself.

"Mr. Paul Batford, I believe," the stranger observed.

"That is my name, sir," was the response.

"I would like to talk with you in private for a few minutes, upon a little matter of business."

"Very well, sir, step in," making way for him to do so. "You are a stranger to me, sir, but it seems plain that I am the person you desire to see. Sit down."

Batford moved his hand toward a chair, taking one himself.

The stranger sat down, and as he did so a big revolver appeared in his hand, which he rested on his knee as he crossed his legs, facing Batford.

The latter gave a great start, and slightly paled.

"It looks as if you had come on business," he remarked, trying to appear unconcerned.

"Yes, I said it was a little matter of business," rejoined the other, grimly. "I am Detective Connors, of the Police Department."

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Connors, although this is hardly the way in which one would naturally care to scrape acquaintance with a man of your profession."

"I suppose not. But that aside. You had a caller a few minutes ago, as I happen to know."

"Yes?"

"You do not admit it?"

"I admit nothing. What are you driving at?"

"By those clothes spread out there, I take it you were out in the rain last night."

"Maybe I fell in Cherry Creek this morning."

"That will be easy enough for you to prove, no doubt. This visitor you had was a valued woman."

"Was she?"

"And she passed here for your mother. She came from Roger King's residence, where, as you must have heard, his son was murdered last night."

"Indeed!"

"The murder was committed either before or during the storm, for the body was lying out in a good part of the heavy rainfall."

Now, the question is, what do you know about that crime?"

"Nothing."

"You were out in the storm."

"So you say; I have not admitted it yet."

"This woman came to you direct from the scene of the crime."

"You seem to be loaded to the muzzle with information; why have you come to me?"

"To find out what you know."

"I know nothing."

"That remains to be seen. You are my prisoner, Paul Batford, charged with the murder of Phil King! Resist, or attempt to do so, and you are a dead man."

Batford laughed. He evidently had looked for this, and had nerved himself for it.

"Your visit means business with a vengeance, Mr. Connors," he said, cheerfully.

"But you never made a greater mistake in all your life. I had nothing to do with the murder of Phil King—no more than you yourself!"

"All the better for you, then, if you can prove it."

"And it will not be any trouble for me to do that. You want me to go along with you, of course?"

"Certainly; but, no hurry. Plenty of time for a little chat, first. If you are innocent, as you claim, maybe you can put me on the track of the guilty one?"

"In saying which, you admit that you have no proof against me."

"I'm following your lead, since you have declared that you can prove yourself innocent."

"Well, I have no information to give away, just now. If you will give me a few minutes to slick up, I will be ready to accompany you. I'm no fool, and I see you have got the bulge on me in the hardest kind of way."

"It is well for you that you recognize the fact. Go ahead, but bear in mind that I am a pretty good shot, and at the first sign of trying to light out, I'll wing you."

"Oh, that is all right; I am not taking the risk, thank you. I can be ready in a short time. There are some cigars, help yourself; but, perhaps you had better give your whole time to watching me, and not attempt to smoke."

The prisoner laughed lightly.

"I believe I will take your advice," said the detective. "I see the banter in what you suggest, but I am not falling into your trap, if that is what you intend, even admitting that there would be the ghost of a chance for you to carry out your idea."

The next instant the detective was jerked over backward with such violence that he came to the floor with a crash.

Instantly the prisoner was upon him, and a clip with a black-jack rendered Connors insensible.

Batford rose with a smile.

"I think he will remember his first meeting with Paul Batford, if he comes to to remember anything," he grimly muttered.

The detective had been leaning back in his chair, slightly, and the chair was standing on a strip of carpet that ran from the door of the room across to the washstand.

Stooping over as he was about getting up, Batford gave this strip of carpet a fierce jerk, with the result shown.

"Heavens! but that was a close call for me," he said to himself. "I thought he had me hard and fast enough. But, it seems he hadn't, thanks to a little brains. And now to dust out of here!"

He began making hasty preparations for a departure.

Looking around, as if to select garments from his scant wardrobe, one suit of clothes being wet, a thought struck him.

He acted upon it instantly. He locked the door, and in another minute had stripped the detective of his outer garments, which he lost no time in donning himself, even to boots and hat.

The detective had a mustache something like his own, and once Batford had on his clothes a casual observer might have mistaken him for Connors. And Batford aided the deception in every manner within his means, too, and armed himself with Connors's weapon.

This done, he hurriedly took such things

as he wanted, in the way of papers, etc., not forgetting his money.

When ready, he opened the door and stepped out.

"Well, good-day, Mr. Batford," he said aloud, imitating the detective's voice to the best of his ability. "I am greatly obliged to you."

"Oh! that is all right; don't mention it, sir," he spoke in lower tone, in his natural voice. "Good-day to you, and good luck!"

Then he closed the door, and laughing within himself, descended the stairs.

The servant was in the lower hall, and he acknowledged her presence by a very slight nod as he passed out.

It was some twenty minutes later when Detective Connors came to.

For some seconds he was unable to get his bearings, so to say, but the moment he did so he leaped to his feet.

He staggered like a drunken man, and pressed his hand to his head, where he discovered a good-sized lump, and then he made the further discovery that he was minus his clothes.

It all came back to him then. He remembered his prisoner in the act of jerking the strip of carpet, but he could not act quickly enough to prevent the fall, and that was about the last he remembered of the circumstances. He recalled this much with great chagrin.

Clothing himself with such garments as the man had left him, he made a close search of the room, but found nothing important.

He then descended to the hall and summoned the servant.

Her amazement was so great, to find it was the stranger who had called, now in Batford's clothes, that she could hardly answer questions, and about the only thing the detective learned was the length of time Batford had been gone.

CHAPTER X.

COOL JOHN AND PAID.

THERE was no handsomer man in the city of Denver than "Cool John."

Of splendid physique and commanding presence, he had faultless features, a pair of keen, black eyes, and a perfect mustache.

He was about thirty years of age, and was a sport about town. No one knew a great deal concerning him, but the general verdict was that he was "white," and a man to tie to, every time.

With a force of nerve equal to any emergency, almost, he had come to be called, popularly, a "man of sand." Some denominated him the "sport of the steady hand;" and other appellations were applied to him. No one knew who or what he really was, as we shall see eventually.

No wonder, then, that his arrest upon the charge of having killed Phil King set his friends agog.

The sport had not been in jail an hour when he had a visitor.

This visitor was one whose appearance alone was enough to lose for him the favor he asked, but strangely enough he was readily admitted.

He was a big, burly fellow, heavy in flesh and red of face, roughly clad, wearing a much-worn slouch hat, and having a bristly beard and mustache, and hair that was unkempt.

He was just such a person, in appearance, as one would wish most to avoid meeting in a lonesome place on a dark night.

This man, Hugh Brown, tipped the beam at two hundred and odd pounds, and was popularly known as the "Big Bay."

Just why he was called that, does not appear.

And this man, as said, had no trouble in gaining access to the prisoner, soon after his arrest.

He was admitted into the cell with the accused sport, and the moment the doors swung open to admit him, he exclaimed:

"What ther deuce does this mean, Cool John?"

"I hardly know myself, Big Bay," was the response. "Here I am, though."

"But you never done et?"

"Of course not."

"Who did?"

"That is for you and me to find out."

"But you ain't in much of a position for active juries now, I'm durn'd ef ye be."

"That is so, I admit, but I fancy I will not remain here a great while. In the mean time you must get out and hustle and learn all you can, and try to scare up a clue for me."

"But, durn et, pard, they seem ter have ther dead wood on ye purty hard."

It will be noted that the Big Bay was as uncouth in speech as he was unkempt in general appearance.

"Yes, I have to admit that," acquiesced the prisoner.

The door had now been locked upon them and the jailer had gone away, leaving them alone.

"And can't you explain it away?"

"Oh, I could brush it off easily enough, Big Bay, if I had a mind to reveal myself and tell the whole story."

"Then why don't ye?"

"Because I am not yet ready to make myself known, and for the better reason that it would place another person in an undesirable position."

"You are durn p'ticular about other folks, seems to me, when you allow yourself to be jugged on account of 'em. Ef it was me, you kin bet that I would let out, mighty quick."

"Well, you and I are different men, Big Bay."

"I reckon you are more'n half right, pardner."

"What do you hear around town?"

"Why, thar ain't anybody that knows ye but what believes you are innercent."

"I am glad of that, and they are not mistaken. I am as guiltless of that crime as you are, Ben Bay."

"How kem your locket thar?"

"I don't know."

"Ye don't know? That's a stumper!"

"I do not know, I repeat."

"When did it go out of your possesion?"

"Nor do I know that. I remember it was in its place yesterday afternoon."

"Wull, et looks mighty funny."

"I have an idea how it came there, however."

"Hal that's better. How was et?"

"That is something I must not tell—at any rate, not yet."

"Not even me?"

"Not even you, Big Bay."

"Then thar is some secret in et all, an' you are mixed up in et somehow, that is as plain as print."

"Well, I won't try to upset that conviction, Big Bay. And then the fact that I was out in the storm, and will give no account of my whereabouts—all that makes out a case, you see."

"Et comes mighty durn close to et, I allow."

"Do you know what moves the detectives are making?"

"Wull, not ter know much about et, but they mean business."

"And so must we. Now, Big Bay, I am going to lay out a little work for you, and I expect you to do your prettiest."

"Jest so, pardner; count me yours truly, every time!"

"I saw Phil King in the Phoenix last night at ten o'clock."

"Hillo! Mebbby you are comin' at et, pard?"

"That is for you to find out. He was talking with a strange woman of rather dashing appearance."

"Durn me ef I ever heard of ary ornery diffikilty yet that didn't have a woman mixed up in et somewheres. What about this p'ticular critter?"

"That is what I expect you to ascertain; what about her?"

"All right; it's my game, she is!"

"They were sitting at the third table from the stage, second row from the wall, right-hand side as you face the stage."

"I stow et away, pardner."

"And see that you do not give it away; we will work this lay ourselves; none other must have a hand in it."

"Kerreck."

"Pb! and this woman were as thick as honey and about as sweet. When I saw them, and Phil gave me the wink when I caught his eye."

"What did that mean?"

"Well we had seen the woman before,

and he had made his boast to me that he would form her acquaintance and make a conquest. He wanted me to understand that he was doing it."

"I see."

"You know the kind of fellow Phil was; he might have gone to the deuce more than once, if it hadn't been for me, and I don't say it to boast, either."

"You ain't the boastin' kind, Cool John; that everybody knows."

"Well, I learned from him that this woman was from New York, and she had given him the impression that she was pretty well fixed with this world's goods. Her appearance went to prove that such was the case, anyhow. And he hinted that if he could work it right he would return with her."

"Exack!"

"Well, that was the last I saw of Phil King alive, and while it may not have had anything to do with his death, it must not be overlooked!"

"Wull, ruther not, I should say!"

"I want you to get on track of that woman, in a quiet way, find out exactly what time Phil left the Phoenix, and whether she went with him, and all about it. Then, find out where she is now."

"I'll tackle et, pard, right by ther horns."

"Somebody in the Phoenix may be able to tell you something, and I want you to examine that table where they sat."

"What fer?"

"Phil had a pencil in his fingers and was idly marking with it, and it is barely possible that he jotted something there that will be of use to us."

"Hal now methinks I begin to sniff ther battle from afar, ez et wur! That is a long chance fer a clue, but et may be right thar, as you say."

"Don't omit to look for it, anyhow."

"You bet!"

"And then, meet me at midnight at the corner of Seventeenth and Tremont, and we will begin work together."

"Meet you?" in something of surprise.

"You look a lot like meetin' anybody, cooped up here like you are. And that's only a stone's throw from the Court House, if you are thinkin' of givin' 'em the slip."

The prisoner smiled, and explained something in a whisper, and after some further talk the Big Bay took his departure.

CHAPTER XI.

PERSONS DISAPPEAR.

WHEN Rosa King left the house it was with even more of secrecy than her mother had employed.

She merely stepped out into the grounds, as if for an ordinary purpose, and that was the last that was seen of her for some time.

Sauntering out of the grounds by a rear way, she went to the house of a girl friend, where she borrowed a hat and wrap with which to make a trip into the city, explaining to this friend where she was going.

She was one to be trusted.

Like the mother, she wore a veil, and thought she was unknown.

And so she was, save to the detective who followed her as faithfully as her own shadow all the way.

Her destination was the jail.

There she asked permission to see John Handy, stating that she was his sister.

Permission was not denied her, and as she was not known there, no one could disprove the statement she had made. Handy might have half a dozen sisters, for what they knew to the contrary.

The moment the cell door was opened to her, she sprung in, exclaiming:

"My brother! oh! my brother!"

She threw her arms around the prisoner, and he embraced her, speaking to her in words too low for the jailer to overhear.

They stood silent, then, until the man had locked the door and gone away, when the prisoner released his visitor from his embrace, placed the cell stool for her, and himself sat down on the edge of his cot.

"Why did you do it?" he then asked, with concern.

"Do what, John?"

"Come here."

"How could I help but come? I was so afraid that you would not understand why I was silent."

"Of course I understood it, my pet. You could not tell the truth without revealing your secret, and you knew if you admitted that I was in the grounds last night, it would appear all the worse for me."

"Yes, but you knew I could explain about the locket, John."

"You?" in surprise.

"Yes. Did you not know that I took it from your chain when you held me in your embrace by the gate?"

"I did not know it, but I have thought of that as a possible solution of the mystery. Then you dropped it on your way back to the house?"

"I suppose so. But there is deeper and more terrible mystery than all this, and God alone knows where the guilt will rest when the truth is brought to light. I know only that you and I are innocent."

"What do you mean? It was foolish of you to come here, for now suspicion may be directed toward you."

"I hardly think any one saw me come here; I used great care—"

"Do not deceive yourself, Rosa; a detective has not lost sight of you since you left the house, and he will not lose sight of you until you return. Not that his eye is actually upon you now, but he knows where you are."

She seemed alarmed.

"Do you think so?" she gasped.

"I can swear to it. But, here you are, and the mischief has been done, no matter what is to be the outcome. But, what is this deeper and more terrible mystery at which you hint—indeed, which you declare exists?"

Thereupon she told him all that has been made known to the reader, that is to say, all of which she had knowledge.

He listened with close attention to the end.

As soon as she stopped he looked up, with a sudden question.

"Was it a right, or a left hand—that hand you saw in the window? Think well, now."

The young lady was puzzled, quite. How could she tell now?

"Think hard," the prisoner urged, earnestly. "Much may depend on your answer to that simple question."

"Alas! it is impossible for me to tell; I have no way of knowing. But, I saw it, as distinctly as I see my own hand now."

She held up her own hand as she spoke.

"Let me help you, if I can," said Cool John. "As you looked from the window of your bed-chamber, that other window was on your left, was it not?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, now, when that hand appeared, which were towards you, the knuckles? or the thumb and fingers? as it clutched the—"

"Hal now I know! And, how simple it is, when one sees it! It was a left hand that I saw!"

"Are you sure of that? How do you know it was a left hand?"

"Yes, I am sure. The thumb and fingers were toward me, plainly visible. I know I am not mistaken; I can swear to it."

"And your mother, is she left-handed?"

The young lady had been somewhat pale from the first, but now she became suddenly like death itself.

"Great Heavens!" she gasped.

"Then she is left-handed, is she?"

"Yes, yes; useless to deny it. But, oh, John, she did not do the terrible deed; I am sure she did not!"

"I am pretty well convinced of it myself, Rosa, but it remains to prove her innocent. You yourself have said that you thought the hand might be hers, when you saw it. Let us look it squarely in the face."

"But, why should she kill Phil?"

"Do you know of any reason?"

"Not the slightest. She rather liked him, it were more reasonable to suspect me, I think, because I did not like him."

"And yet that is no reason why you should be suspected."

"Perhaps not; but, if I am innocent, so is mamma; I had rather take the crime upon myself than—"

"Not another word of that! But, have you told me everything you can? Have you mentioned to any one else besides your father this matter of the hand of fire?"

"No, no; except mamma—Heavens! everything is against her!"

"What is it now?"

"I know that I can trust you, John; I know that you will not believe her guilty; but, when I told papa about the hand, mamma fainted and fell from her chair. But, you will, you must help me to prove her innocent!"

John Handy looked serious enough.

"What did she say when she came to?" he asked.

"Why, she came to in fright, and exclaimed: 'My God! That hand of fire!' And then she said that she, too, had seen it, and she gave the hint that she had suspected that it was I who fired the shot."

"You saw nothing more than the hand and the weapon?"

"Not a thing more."

"Or she?"

"Not a thing more, she declared; and the bushes hid her view the same as my own."

"Well, well, it is a mystery profound, sure enough. But it shall be cleared up, I swear it! And the crime shall be put where it belongs. Now, Rosa, since this secret of ours is out, and since you have been followed here, why not disclose the whole truth?"

"No, no! That would lead to mamma's arrest; I am sure it would; and that would kill me. I cannot do that."

"But you cannot hope to hold out against those detectives, my darling. Now that they know so much, they certainly will ferret out the rest, and—"

"And for me to tell what I know would fasten the crime upon her perhaps, innocent as she is. No, no, it cannot be, John; I must save her, no matter what the cost to me."

She remained a little longer, and then took her leave.

Later in the day the detectives decided to make the arrest of Mrs. King, upon evidence they had somehow secured.

But she was not at home, nor was she to be found. She had given them the slip, and they searched for her in vain.

What had become of her? Was she, in truth, the one guilty of the crime?

At a late hour that night the banker's wife skurried through one of Denver's darkest streets, casting now and again an apprehensive glance over her shoulder at a great, rough-looking man who was persistently following her. She carried a valise, and wore no veil, but the manner of her dress was her disguise.

And on the following morning the discovery was made that John Handy, or "Cool John," had escaped jail! When or how, no one knew, but he was gone; and, strange to say, he had left every article of clothing behind him in his cell! Here was a sensation, truly, and the papers made the most of it. The authorities were as much at loss as the public, and investigation threw no light upon the mystery.

CHAPTER XII.

ACCIDENT, OR DESIGN?

NEW YORK CITY.

It was night, and a late train from the West had just rolled into the Grand Central.

Among the passengers, as they left the cars and came filing out to the street, were two who claimed more than a passing glance from the idlers who stood around.

These two were men.

One was a handsome, finely formed fellow of thirty years or so, tall, supple and graceful in carriage, with a faultless mustache and a pair of keen black eyes. He was clad in a well-fitting suit of serviceable material, and wore a hat that gave him a decidedly Western stamp.

His companion was apparently fifteen years his senior, a big, heavy person, of decidedly rougher appearance. He had a coarse, red face, with hair, beard and mustache all unkempt, and wore a hat of the slouch variety that had certainly seen better days, to say the least of it. His clothes were good, but were coarse of texture and quite ample.

They marched out shoulder to shoulder, and even the most obstreperous of the hackmen there congregated exhibited a timidity about soliciting their favor.

"Wull, hyer we aire," remarked the last described, when they had gained the open street.

"Yes, here we are, Big Bay, sure enough," the other responded.

"And it's a matter of twenty-five years since I left these parts, Cool John," the first speaker reflected.

"It is fully fifteen years since I was a boy on the streets here, too," the younger rejoined. "I used to know the city like an open book, in those days, but it has greatly changed, no doubt."

"Changed! Wull I should remark that et has, pard. Even this hyer brief glimpse of et is enough to show me that I am a pilgrim an' a stranger hyer, ter say nothin' about bein' a tenderfoot ter boot. But, I opine we kin hold our own, ef it comes to a pinch."

"We have done that many a time before, Big Bay, and I guess we shall be able to do it here."

"Well, where to?"

"A place to lodge is the first thing in order."

"Yes, I s'pose so, fer we can't hope ter git down to biz the minute we land hyer."

"And we may as well go right down-town, where we are both better acquainted with the lay of the land, and where we naturally expect to strike the trail."

"You are ther captain, pard; jest as you say."

"All right; we'll take a car, as soon as I get my bearings; useless to walk if we can ride."

"I opine you are more'n half right, Cool John. But, say, what do these hyer galoots mean by stalkin' after us the way they are doin'? I'm blest ef I don't kinder surspicion 'em."

Cool John glanced around.

Three men were certainly coming after them, and not a great distance behind.

"It is quite likely that they are paying no attention to us, Big Bay," the Man of Sand remarked. "We shall have our hands full, if we suspect everybody who happens to cross our trail, here."

"That's hoss sense, I allow, but all ther same I don't like ther looks of these hyer galoots. I'm goin' to keep one eye on 'em till we board that car you spoke about."

"All right; that can do no harm, certainly."

They had turned a corner, without any particular reason for doing so, and now found themselves on a somewhat darker and more deserted street.

When the Big Bay looked around again the three men were still coming after them, and had drawn a little nearer, and again he called the attention of his companion to them.

"It does look suspicious, now, that is the fact," Cool John assented. "It can do no harm to be prepared for them."

As he said this he produced a gun, the Big Bay doing the same.

"If they are thugs, and want to sample us, let them come right up and take a taste," the sport of the steady hand added, jocosely.

Presently they passed under a street lamp, and, as they did so, glanced back over their shoulders. What they now saw fully confirmed their suspicions of the three fellows.

They were now quite close, and were an evil-looking trio.

One seemed to be fairly well-dressed, wore a mustache of neat turn, and appeared to be the chief of the party.

The second, the largest of the three, was a villainous-looking customer, and had one hand hooked in the arm of the other and their heads were close together. The first seemed to be talking to him.

The third a whiskered night-walker, was close to the second, with his hands in his pockets and his eyes apparently fixed upon the two men whom they seemed to be following. In fact, there could scarcely be any doubt upon that point, now, for the one first mentioned seemed to be pointing at them.

Cool John and his comrade strode steadily on, holding their weapons so that they were not likely to be seen.

In a few moments they came to another street and turned the corner.

"Now," whispered Cool John, "this turn will tell the story. If they follow us further we will hold them up at the point of the gun."

"Kerreck, pardner!" responded the Big Bay.

The men did turn the corner, the next moment, and came on, now at an increased pace.

If thugs they were, with evil intent toward these men out of the West, nowhere would they be likely to find a better spot for their purpose than right here, as perhaps they recognized.

But the men of the West were first to act. Wheeling suddenly, a couple of long strides brought them face to face with the trio.

Their guns were to the fore, and they were more than a match for as many again of the fellows, under the circumstances, having the drop.

"Now, then, what do you fellows want?" So demanded Cool John, in his coolest manner, addressing the one he took to be the ringleader.

"What's the matter with you?" was the counter demand. "Do you mean to rob us? Let us proceed, or I'll call police."

"Call them, if you want to. You have been following us, and we thought we would just stop and ask what you wanted. Anything we can do for you?"

"That's what's the matter," chipped in the Big Bay. "Ef you have picked us fer a pair of stray mavericks, you never made a greater mistook in all yer life, fer we are longhorns of reg'lar brand you bet!"

"We don't care what you are; let us pass!"

"Certainly; pass right on," assented Cool John, "and take care that we don't run up against you again."

He stepped aside as he spoke, the Big Bay doing the same.

"I guess we have the same right to the street as you," was the retort.

"We don't question that, Mister Walker, but we don't purpose being dogged around by you or anybody else."

"And who was doggin' ye?" blurted the biggest of the three.

"It looked very much as if you were doing that same."

"Well, we wasn't; see?"

"All right; we'll take your word for it. Don't let us detain you, now, if you are in a hurry. Pass right along."

The three moved on, muttering to themselves, and they cast scowling glances back at the Westerners, who stood looking after them until they had passed out of sight.

"Wull, what's yer think?" questioned the Big Bay, then.

"It is plain they were following us," answered John. "But we nipped their little game right in the bud."

"You bet! But what was their game, d'ye think?"

"Why, they took us for a brace of greenhorns, no doubt, and meant to slug us and go through our pockets."

"Wull, they struck a snag, sure enough, that time. Ha, ha, ha! But, say, thar was one thing I noticed, pard: that slick chap 'minded me of somebody."

"The very thing I meant to mention to you."

"Sho!"

"Yes, the fact. That fellow looks like the murdered Phil King, of Denver, or I am a coyote!"

"Ther same, by ther great horned toad! What d'ye make of et?"

"Oh, it's merely a coincidence, I guess. But see here; I guess I will have to take a pointer from a policeman, in order to get the car we want. No use of our running around wild any longer."

They retraced their steps, made inquiry, and presently were on their way down-town on a train on the Third Avenue L. "But, unknown to them, they were shadowed. Many persons observed them closely, but there was one in particular who held them under surveillance!"

CHAPTER XIII.

APPEARS A NEW PHASE.

THIS man, for a man it was, was a passenger on the same train with them.

Coming out of the station, he had given a signal to the three fellows whom Cool John and his pard so neatly tricked.

Waiting there at the station for the return of these, his confederates, whose errand evidently had been one of a dark nature, what

was his surprise to see the two Westerners return instead.

But, when they took the L train, he followed.

Cool John and his pard alighted at Chat-ham Square; likewise this fellow, their shadower.

The Westerners looked around and soon found a hotel that would suit their purpose, registered, and sought their room for the night. And as soon as they had gone up this man came forward.

"How do, Will?" he addressed the clerk.

That worthy looked up, and, seeing who it was, put out his hand.

"Hello, Nutter!" he greeted; "how are you? Where been keeping yourself these ten days?"

"Oh, I have been running around a little for the good of my health. By the way, who were those fellows who just went up to roost?"

"Strangers to me; a pretty tough couple, I should say."

"Looked like Westerners."

"So they are."

The clerk indicated the register, with a motion of the thumb as he spoke, as if inviting his friend to help himself to whatever information he might be able to get there.

Mr. Nutter promptly availed himself of the privilege.

He read:

"John Jones,"	} El Reno,	Ok."
"Wm. Brown,"		

"Yes, pretty good," he muttered to himself. "Handy names, Jones and Brown; very! And they acknowledge the West as their native stamping-ground; couldn't very well do otherwise."

"What are you growling about?" demanded the clerk, playfully.

"Oh, nothing; but you have got a pair of wild steers on your hands, by the looks of things, and you want to watch out for them. Here, give me a cigar, and take one yourself."

The clerk laughed, passed out a box of cigars, and, after some further talk of the small sort, his friend Nutter, as he called him, went away.

Nutter sauntered up the Bowery until he came to a popular resort.

There he entered.

In the course of an hour another man came in, looking searchingly around the room. Nutter signaled him.

This fellow was the leader of the trio who had followed Cool John and the Big Bay, and who had been so neatly baffled by the two men out of the West.

He was looking as glum as a thunderstorm.

"What in the merry deuce happened?" questioned Nutter, as soon as he came up.

"What happened?" the other repeated. "If you had been there, Dick, I guess you would have seen what happened."

He threw himself upon a chair, helping himself to something that Nutter had ordered for his own regalement while he waited.

"Well, what did happen?"

"Why, just when we were about to tackle them, they tackled us!"

"Didn't I give you warning to take extra precautions? I told you the kind of men they were."

"But, who would have thought of that? I had Gib Wilson and Webb Harker with me, and I consider them the equal of any two men you can pick anywhere."

"They certainly are; and with you to help— Hang me if I see how you got dumped."

"Well, they simply turned on us and had their pistols under our noses before we knew what had happened and there we were."

"I'll be hanged!"

"And now the question is, where are they?"

"Oh, that need not trouble you any; I have located them all right."

"You have? Where be they?"

"At the — House."

"Then we can fix them out, yet."

"Yes, we can take care of them, now, and maybe it is better so, for, you see, we can take more time to it. There was a good deal of risk about this first plan, anyhow."

"That was what I said when I got the word from you, but I thought you knew what you was talking about, so I called in the boys and was on hand, as you ordered."

"It would have been all right if it had worked all right."

"Yes, for the boys meant to give them such a thump that they would never have come to, this side of the river."

"Well, the boys have seen them, now, and that is one point gained. They will know them, and will have that much the advantage next time. There are more ways than one to skin a cat."

"Yes, and they have seen Gib and Webb, too, so it is about an even thing. It remains to be seen what we can do. But, what about things West?"

"You have seen the papers?"

"Yes; a mysterious case, that."

"Decidedly mysterious. Of course, the papers here have given only the leading fact."

"That is about all, except that suspicion now rests upon Mrs. King, who has mysteriously disappeared, and that the man who was arrested has strangely broken out of jail."

"Yes, and that is one point I can't understand."

"What's that?"

"His escape."

"What about it, to make it so mysterious?"

"Why, he was simply gone, they said, and had left all his clothes, even to his socks!"

"That does seem strange, sure enough."

"And, this fellow is the man, the younger of the couple you tried to tackle to-night."

"The deuce!"

"The fact. He is chain lightning. If all they say about him is true, and something of a man of mystery himself; but, he will find that he has made the mistake of his life in coming to New York."

"Yes; but, go on."

"Go on with what? That's all there is of it."

"I mean, tell me all about that mystery at Denver; that is what I am anxious to know."

"Oh, yes; certainly. Well, you have got the leading facts, of course, so I need not go over the whole ground. It seems the banker's son was killed right close to his father's house. A locket was found by the body, which proved to belong to the man who was arrested. That was the only clue that was to be had."

"But, it came out that the banker's wife paid a mysterious visit to a man of bad reputation in the city, next morning; the detectives following her. One of them set about arresting that man, but he got the worst of it, somehow, and the suspect escaped. It looked mighty bad for the wife, then, and they went to arrest her, but she was gone. And, last of all, the daughter, too, skipped out."

"Well, that made a tangle of it, sure enough. Which do you think was the guilty one?"

"That is not an easy question to answer. The one they can catch and fasten the crime upon, I suppose. The banker himself was knocked clear out of time, when he found himself entirely alone, and made a clean breast of everything he knew. He said his daughter was in love with John Handy, and when the locket was found her picture and that of the sport were in it. Then he told a story about his wife and daughter's having seen a hand in the window about the time the crime was thought to have been committed."

"The impression given out was, that the wife and daughter apparently had something of a suspicion toward, or against, each other. This hand had a pistol in it, for they both claimed to have seen it by the light of a flash of lightning. It was held as if a shot had just been fired, or as if the person was on the point of shooting. Whether they lied, or told the truth, no one could say. It seems, now, as if both may have been guilty, removing the son so that the daughter by this second wife would come in for all the banker's wealth. Be that as it may, the fact remains that the son is dead, the wife and daughter are missing, and the old man is all broke up over it."

"About as pretty a situation as could be wished for," remarked the listener, rubbing his hands together with satisfaction.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE "A. S." CLUE.

MEANWHILE Cool John and pard had held a confab.

They were now on the field of action, for it was not to be supposed that they had come to New York without some powerful incentive.

If that was so, then there were grounds for assuming John Handy guilty of the murder of Philip King; but, as our word has been given that he was not the person, the incentive must have another solution.

From their own lips we have already learned that they had come to the metropolis with a well defined object in view. They had come on business, and here they expected to pick up again a trail that had been lost to them in the West. In fact, they had a clue.

When they had made themselves comfortable, on retiring to their room, they looked over the situation.

The Big Bay opened the talk by repeating the first remark he had made on arriving in the city:

"Well, hyer we aire."

"As snug as bugs in a rug," completed Cool John. "Are you sleepy, you hard-looking galoot?"

"Not a bit, pardsey. But, take a leetle keer how you daub on pet names when you dress me. I know I ain't as good lookin' as you, but I'm ounces to the pound, every time."

They both laughed, passingly.

"What I was going to say," John added, "we may as well run over the points in the game, and see where we stand. We have hardly mentioned it, on the way here."

"I opine you aire about right."

"The fact of my remarkable escape from jail—that counts nil. The fact that you met me at the appointed time and place is the real beginning."

"Kerreck."

"You had the information that Mrs. King had taken flight, or, at any rate, was missing, and that the daughter, too, was for the time being ditto. But you had something more important than that."

"Prezack."

There was quaint uncouthness in the Big Bay's laconic draws.

"You had a clue, and that, under the circumstances, meant everything, and we set out to follow it up at once. I was innocent of the crime, of course, and I knew that Miss King was; I also thought the same about the mother, though there the appearances were rather shady."

"Durn shady!"

"You had done well the work that I had set for you. You learned that Philip King had talked with the unknown woman for a considerable time in the Phoenix after I saw them there. You learned that the woman left the place first, and that she and Phil parted in the most friendly manner. You looked well at the table, and there discovered some careless jottings that Phil had made while talking with her."

"Jes' so."

"Among other things on that table, in the smallest kind of hand, as you have described it to me, you found a number and a name, and the initials A. S. And that is the clue that has brought us here."

"Et is."

"The name was the name of a street, evidently, and the figures the number of a house on that street. I knew there was no such street in Denver, and in fact I had never heard of a street of that name outside of New York."

"Tally!"

"The initials undoubtedly stood for a person, and they fit nobody connected with this case, so far as we know. We made the guess that they stood for the name of the woman with whom Phil King talked at the time when he marked them there. That remains to be seen."

"You bet!"

"Phil left the place a little later, with the remark that he was going home and to bed."

as he had been out late for five nights straight. And that was the last that was seen of him, far as our record tells, until he was found cold and stiff the next morning. Now the question is, did that woman have anything to do with his taking off?"

"You think she had?"

"Yes; or, at any rate she may be able to give us the clue, if she can be found. We learned that a woman answering that description left Denver for New York, and that fact alone is suspicious. You think her innocent, from the fact that such a clue was found on that table. You think, if guilty, she would never have given her name and address to Phil. You may be right; if she meant to kill him, or knew that he was going to be killed, what would be the difference whether he knew her name or not?"

"And that woman is the critter we are after."

"Decidedly. To-morrow morning begins the warfare, even if it hasn't been begun already."

"What d'ye mean?"

"The more I think of those three fellows the more suspicious it looks."

"I agree with ye in that, pardner."

"It is a little strange that we should have been jumped so soon after our arrival, for they certainly meant mischief."

"I think so, too."

"But, by what means can they have known us? And what possible reason could they have had for wanting to run up against us that way? Maybe, after all, they were only what they seemed."

"Robbers, hey?"

"Yes, common footpads, after our colateral."

"Mebby you are right. Then there is that feller, Paul Batford."

"Yes, you learned from the detectives that it was pretty certain he had come this way, too."

"And, as I said in the beginnin', hyer we aire."

On the following morning the two pards out of the West were astir bright and early.

They came down from their room looking as fresh as larks, and there was somewhat of a change in the appearance of the Big Bay.

He was washed, combed and brushed to the finest, and might have been mistaken for a millionaire mine owner, whose wealth was the excuse for any little eccentricity in the matter of dress.

And Cool John, he was as dapper as a new pin.

A casual observer would have taken them for father and son, perhaps, who had come in from some far-off ranch to "do" the town.

They breakfasted, and after an hour or so of loitering around, left their humble hotel and went forth for a stroll, to kill time until a proper hour for Cool John to make a contemplated call.

They strolled up the Bowery, and in due time came out on Union Square.

A man had been following them all the way, and this shadower was Dick Nutter.

While the two stood there noting the changes the passing years had wrought, Dick approached them.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," he saluted, "but haven't I seen you before?"

"Maybe you have, sir," responded the Man of Sand.

"We hev been in the world for a considerable spell of while, leas'tways I have," chimed in the Big Bay.

"Did I not see you in Denver, something like a month ago?"

"We were there about that time, that is true," assented Cool John, with a look at the Big Bay.

"Right you be," the latter coincided.

"I thought I could not be mistaken, gentlemen. Of course, you do not know me, but my name is Welter, Job Welter, and as the folks of Denver did the right thing by me when I was there, I am anxious to return the compliment."

"Well, I don't care if I do," assured the Big Bay, wiping his mouth with his hand. "What say, boy?"

Dick Nutter laughed.

"Well, let us begin our acquaintance that way, then," he suggested. "Here is a place

right handy, and if you will do me the honor to join me, come along."

He took a step in the direction of a pair of mirrored swinging doors hard by, as he spoke, and Cool John and his pard followed him unhesitatingly, the Man of Sand leading.

"Being strangers in the city, the sport made remark, 'it will not come amiss to get acquainted with somebody who knows the trails. My name is John Jones, Mr. Welter, and this is my uncle, William Brown, commonly called Uncle Bill out in Oklahoma, where we hail from. Our place is near El Reno. Ever been there?'"

"No, I never have," as he shook hands. "You must have been on a visit to Denver, then, when I saw you there."

"Yes, we wur takin' a leetle spin," explained the Big Bay.

CHAPTER XV.

WESTERN SPORT AND CITY SHARP.

COOL JOHN was not deceived; neither was the Big Bay.

The latter, however, had taken his cue from the Man of Sand, and followed his lead.

This fellow was either honest in what he had stated, or he was a decoy, and in either case it could do no harm to let him have a little line—as they put it afterward.

The stranger was a young man, maybe thirty years of age, and not at all bad looking.

He was well dressed, and had the stamp of a Bowery blood.

Cool John had sized him up quickly, a way he had, and believed that he scented a lay-out of some kind or other in the background.

Had the man named any other place than Denver, then they would have suspected a game in the line of green goods, or the like, and nothing more; but mentioning that place, Cool John looked deeper.

The fellow might be perfectly straight, and his story strictly true, as said; but Cool John believed that the chances were about as dollars to cents that he was a crooked chap, and since they had already had one rough experience, he immediately connected this man with the three thugs of the night before.

They entered the gin palace with him, it being one of the gilded dens with which New York abounds.

"Job Welter" led them to the table, and ordered something of the best.

"When did you strike town, Mr. Jones?" he asked.

"Only last night," the Man of Sand answered. "We have not got the Oklahoma mud off our heels yet."

"And where are you stopping?"

"At the — House."

"You are moderate in your tastes, anyhow. But, what's the odds? You only want it for a place to sleep in, and you would sleep no sounder in the Brunswick."

"I opine you aire about right," agreed the Big Bay. "We don't go much on style, but we are bound to have comfort, ef it is to be had. And we have got the nuggets to put up, you bet!"

"You men of the West usually have, when you come in to do New York."

"And we have come in fer a general round-up," the Big Bay added, in something of a boastful manner.

"Well, what have you got on your programme? What were you going to do with yourselves to-day, if I hadn't forced my company upon you? If I am not wanted, all you have got to do is to say so, and no harm done."

"We had no plans," assured Cool John, "and we are glad we fell in with you."

"If that is so, I'm glad it happened too. I have nothing to do, and had as lief as not pilot you around a little."

"That is settled, then. You furnish the music and we'll pay the fiddler, as our cow-boys say when they have a blow-out at the ranch once in awhile. What do you say to that, Uncle Bill?"

"Your word goes, boy," was the drawl.

"Give us your hand for a good time, then, old man," cried Dick Nutter, in the most pleasing manner.

"You seem like a purty white kind of a galoot," the Big Bay remarked. "I reckon we'll make three of a kind all right, and three of a kind kin knock out any two pairs in the deck; ha, ha, ha!"

And so began their acquaintance, most favorably.

"By the way," Nutter remarked, after awhile, "I see by the papers there has been quite a sensation out there at Denver."

"That so?" queried Cool John. "What is it?"

"A mysterious murder."

"Anybody you knew?"

"No; but it seems like a remarkably strange case."

"That is the sort the newspapers like to get a hold of."

"It seems so."

"Who was killed?"

Thereupon Nutter stated the facts briefly, giving everything that had been made public in the press.

"Well, that is a queer case, sure enough," commented Cool John.

"Yes, and one of the queerest points in it, how that prisoner escaped out of jail."

"It does seem a little more than passing strange, that is true. And the fact that he left all his clothes, as you say, makes it stranger."

"Yes. But, enough of that; it does not concern us."

"Not a bit. Where shall we go?"

Cool John turned it off carelessly, and, had not Dick Nutter been sure of his men, as he was, he must have been puzzled.

"Well," he said, in answer to Cool John's inquiry, "the fact of the matter is, New York is a dull place in the forenoon. In the afternoon it wakes up a little, but it is not until the curtains are drawn that things begin to boom."

"Anything ter kill time," assented the Big Bay.

Their new acquaintance thought for some moments, and then made a proposition, which was readily agreed to, and settling the score, the decoy led them forth to the day's doings.

Cool John had quietly given his ally the tip that they would lend themselves to the fellow's schemes, allowing him to have full swing for a time, and the Big Bay fell in.

The day was well spent, and Nutter conducted himself throughout in a manner calculated to win the confidence of the Westerners. Had there been no ground for suspicion, he must have deceived them completely.

"Well, how have you spent the day?" their guide asked them, as they finished a hearty dinner in a popular resort, along in the evening.

"Right up prime," cried the Big Bay.

"What der you say, boy?"

"I'm satisfied," the Man of Sand acquiesced.

"And now you want to see something of the dark side as well, I suppose?" the fellow inquired.

"You bet!" the Big Bay exclaimed.

"All right; we'll go bobbing round a little, then, if you want to see the elephant."

"Anything to keep our blood in motion," agreed Cool John. "You are the captain, Mr. Nutter."

"Well, I'm ready for anything that offers, now. But, by the way," in a guarded tone, "have you got much about you in the way of valuables? If you have, it might be well to deposit them, somewhere."

"Oh, I guess we can take care of the little we have got in our clothes, don't you think so, uncle?" queried John.

"I opine we kin," was the response. "Ef they get it, they won't draw a big prize, anyhow."

"All right. I thought it only right to caution you," explained Nutter. "You are both armed?"

"Some."

The Bowery blood smiled at the laconic drawls of the elder, and they rose to leave the place.

"You must mean to take us into a pretty hard hole, eh?" remarked the Man of Sand.

"You must expect that, if you want to see the dark side."

"Well, drive on, then."

"Ef you kin stand it, we kin," assumed the Big Bay.

Accordingly, Dick Nutter proceeded to pilot them into one of the most evil sections of the metropolis.

He had worked hard all day, with this in view and now he meant to conduct the unsuspecting flies into the parlor of the spider, so to say. He believed he had won them completely.

But, of course, the men out of the West were not deceived. They were as eager for the fun to begin as their conductor was to entrap them. Cool John had laid aside his own first plan of the day, in order to give this decoy a full chance to work his little game, whatever it might be.

The Denver Sport believed that more was to be gained by so doing, since he was now satisfied fully that Nutter had been in league with the three fellows of the night previous, and he had no doubt but that he and the Big Bay would be able to pull through all in good shape, as they had done many a time before, by standing shoulder to shoulder, if it came to a matter of wit and nerve.

The Big Bay was more than a match for two ordinary men, in mere strength, while for nerve the Man of Steady Hand had never met his better.

But the near future was destined to try nerve and muscle and wit as they never before had been tested.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DARK SCENE OF DARK LIFE.

NEW YORK CITY is a magnificent, opulent city; New York City is a wretched, poverty-stricken place.

It is also a good and pious, charitable town, or it is a bad and vicious, malevolent one; it all depends upon the observer and his point of observation. It abounds with both classes.

Attention is invited to the darker side.

When Cool John and the Big Bay set forth with Dick Nutter, they fully realized the risk they were taking.

But, both accustomed to facing dangers, they did not hold back on account of that; and now, believing that much was to be gained by playing into the hands of this man, for a time, they willingly but warily followed his lead.

A brief journey of twenty minutes wrought a great change in their surroundings. The contrast was most striking; they had stepped from almost the one extreme into the other.

In lieu of light, splendor and cleanliness, here abounded shadow, squalor and wretchedness. True, crime may lurk in the high places, but it seemed as if the sight-seekers had left all of good behind them.

John and the Big Bay had nothing in particular to say to each other, but exchange glances had sufficed, and the expression of grim determination on the face of the Big Bay, of which Cool John knew well the significance. They chatted with their conductor, and there was nothing in their words or manner that could possibly reveal their minds to him.

When, finally, they had descended into what seemed the lowest social depths, their guide led them down some steps, and into a long, narrow saloon, where the very prince of evil seemed to be let loose.

"Now, then, keep a stiff neck," the guide whispered.

"Don't you fear fer us," responded the Big Bay. "I opine we kin keep on our pins; hey, pard?"

"Oh, I don't look for any trouble," said Cool John. "We will meet them half way on their own ground, and as there are three of us we can probably pull through if anything goes wrong."

Their entrance was promptly observed.

Men and women, creatures of the vilest stamp, most of them, surveyed them curiously.

The man of sand with steady hand thought that he detected something of a signal given by Nutter, and as he had a quick eye he believed that he was not mistaken.

But, be that as it might, no one seemed to recognize the man.

The three looked around the room.

Some of those present seemed to look upon them with something of fear, for a moment.

Perhaps there came before their mind's

eye the vision of a police court and a sojourn on the island, or worse.

The mutual inspection lasted for a few moments only.

Then a couple of women tripped forward, one of whom threw her arms around the neck of the Big Bay, exclaiming:

"Hello! Uncle, when did you come to town?"

"How in ther mischief did you know I'm called uncle?" the Big Bay demanded.

"Why, by your looks. Come, now, ain't you going to treat? I'll bet you have got the rocks about you."

Another had spoken to Cool John, while the second of the two first-mentioned addressed Dick Nutter, and was saying something to him.

This was not lost upon Cool John.

"Wull, anything to make myself agreeable, I s'pose," the Big Bay agreed to the proposition. "We are out ter see ther elephant, and I s'pose it costs a leetle somethin' ter make him dance."

"You're the stuff!" the creature exclaimed. "We'll show you all the elephant you want to see, you bet, if you do what's right."

"All right, that's what we're hyer fer; hey, boy?"

"It is your say, Uncle Bill," the sport made response. "And whatever you say goes, generally."

"You bet your life et does," the old fellow cried, as he brought a little money to light. "Hyar, you feller," to the man at the bar, a giant Irishman in red shirt, "set 'em up fer ther gals!"

Cool John was taking a critical survey of everything and everybody, and that without appearing to do so.

He noted that the woman who was talking to Nutter was in earnest.

She was not speaking flippantly.

He could not hear what they said, but he knew well enough that it was business and not foolery.

Nutter took a sudden look in his direction, but the sport was apparently as innocent of observing anything closely as the veriest greenhorn could have been.

Their entrance had caused a momentary check to the revelry that was going on, but now it was resumed with as much fervor as before, if not indeed a great deal more, for the tip had been passed that these "jays" were all right.

The Big Bay flung some money to the red-shirted Irishman, and the latter immediately set out his vile poisons.

None of the three visitors partook of it themselves.

"Here's to you!" cried the woman who had accosted the burly Westerner, and she lifted a full glass.

"Go right in," cried the Big Bay: "et's all paid fer."

"But ain't you going to take any?"

"No; I'm fuller'n a tick now," he answered.

He had not touched a drop, but his appearance was to the contrary.

There was a lively time for a few minutes, which it were just as well to pass over lightly.

While this was going on, the Man of Sand still had his eyes well about him, and he caught sight of a face that might have caused another man a start.

It was that of the tall, grim-looking fellow, the hardest-looking of the trio of thugs of the night before, although he was now in something of a disguise, a beard having been added.

But Cool John was not to be deceived.

The man was well back against the wall, but he had his eyes upon the two men-out-of-the-West.

Neither of the others was there, unless in such disguises as the sport was not able to penetrate.

"Well, now, boys and girls," spoke Dick Nutter, to those gathered around. "I don't suppose you know me, but I'm a solid New York blood, and these gentlemen are friends of mine."

"Good fer you!"

"Bully for the blood!"

"They have come to town to see the sights, and I have undertaken to show 'em around a little, and you don't want to try to put up any games on them, for I won't have it. See? We have got a little money to

spend, but no great pile, and all we want is a fair shake."

"You are the stuff!"

"What ye take us for? The gents will find that we'll use them right."

"That is all we want; I merely mentioned it so that there could be no mistake made. Now, I have been here before, and I am on the square; no police fake about me. What's the matter with going into the back room? Just invite a few friends of yours, ladies, and my word for it there will be a good time all around, and nobody to interfere."

"That is just the racket!" was the eager acclaim. "Come along, Uncle Bill, and you, too, sporty!"

The Big Bay looked at Cool John.

There was nothing that any one else could detect, but they understood.

"Shall we venture further?" the big fellow had plainly asked; and the answer was: "We'll see it to the end, you bet!"

They followed their leaders.

"You are sure of being used well, and there is nothing to fear," assured Nutter, speaking to them. "All these people want to know is that you are square, and they will stand by you through thick and thin."

"We can stand it as long as you can, I guess," answered the sport.

"All right; you lean on me and I'll see you through. I know the ropes, for I have knocked around a good deal."

So into the back room they went, and there were about a score in the company when the door closed behind them, an equal number of men and women; and wine and cigars were called for.

Then it was that the "elephant" was put on exhibition, and here description must cease. What has been said thus far is true to life, to the shame of the great metropolis be it said; what might be told must remain sealed.

Hasten the time when these things shall have been swept away.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DEVIL IN HUMAN FORM.

LEAVING these men of the West for a little time, let us change the scene.

In another part of the city, less than half an hour's distance, in point of time by cars, a far different picture.

A quiet street, splendid residences on every hand, brilliant light in many of the windows, and people for the most part of the better classes thronging the sidewalks.

On one corner was a church, into which some were turning, and one stopping here to meditate would have found it hard to imagine that such a scene as we have just depicted could be found so near at hand. In fact, many of these very residents could not have imagined anything so frightful.

Along this street, at this hour, passed a veiled woman, bearing in her hand a valise.

She walked with a quick, nervous step, and was watching the numbers.

Presently she stopped, pressing her hand to her breast.

She was jostled, and stepping aside out of the current, she placed her valise on the bottom one of the steps of a fine residence.

"I wonder if I dare?" she spoke to herself. "I wonder if I dare? I fear that he will turn me away in anger; I wish I had never come. Better that I had given myself up."

Who was she? What did she mean?

She looked up and down the street, while she rested, and presently she gave a violent start.

"My God!" she gasped. "It is he! and so soon!"

Snatching up the valise, she started to spring up the steps with it, but, ere she had taken three steps, a hand seized her.

"Not so fast, if you please," was hissed in her ear.

"Heavens! Release me, or I will scream."

"You may scream if you want to; that does not alarm me in the least. I want to talk with you for a minute or two."

The man was a dark fellow, with heavy mustache and square chin.

The woman did not carry out her threat, but became quiet at once and descended the steps to the sidewalk.

"I thought you would come here," the man said, "and I have been looking for you

a little, now and then. What do you imagine your reception will be?"

"How did you know?" the woman asked, trembling.

"Well, don't you suppose I know a little something? I have made it my business to find out, that is how I know."

"And you would ruin me utterly?"

"Well, no, not if there is a prospect for me ahead."

"And why have you come here?"

"For a double reason. In the first place, for safety, and in the next place because I thought you would come here."

"But, you will gain nothing; you have all to lose."

"All is lost, you better say."

"And that is all the more reason why you should spare me. I am powerless, now, and if there is a spark of manhood about you you will go away forever."

"As I have no intention of doing that, I suppose I lack that spark. As I have told you before, you are responsible for my being here, and you must take care of me."

"I cannot even take care of myself, Paul."

"Maybe not, but Abner White can. But we must not be seen talking here; I will carry your valise and we will take a little walk."

He took it up as he spoke, and the woman followed him.

"He may cast me out," the woman almost moaned.

"I hardly think so."

"Why do you not think so?"

"I have taken his measure."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I have found that he is not so hard as he used to be; he has turned to good works, and that church there at the corner is partly one of his monuments."

He spoke sneeringly.

"And for that reason—"

"For that reason I am inclined to think he will be only too glad to forgive the past, take you in, and help you out of your dilemma. When a man turns good, he is pretty sure to make that kind of a fool of himself."

"Would that there were far more fools of the kind, and that you were one!"

"Thank you, mother dear!"

"But what have you to say to me? What do you demand of me? I am free from you for a month, at any rate, if you hold to your agreement."

"Yes, I acknowledge that, but I do not see the way clear for your keeping your part of the compact, and if I can be of use to you in that direction, I must do so, you see."

"You will render me desperate."

"No, no, there is no such word as that. Not in this case, at any rate. If one string has broken, another must be tuned, don't you see?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, my next payment cannot come from King, and for that reason you must worm it out of White."

"Never!"

"Oh, yes you will."

"But, I cannot—how can I?"

"There will be a way, and you must grasp it."

"No, no; I swear that I will not!"

She spoke desperately, now, and there came a shade of alarm upon the face of the man.

"I am not going to press you further than you can go," he said; "I will give you a fair chance of course. But, I must live, and you must keep me."

"What will you do when I am dead?"

"Time enough to cross a bridge when one comes to it."

"You will reach this one sooner than you imagine."

"No, I think not."

"You do not know me."

"On the contrary, I think I know you well."

"I assert that you do not know me. If you did you would see that the end is dangerously near."

"Now what would you do?"

"It is not what I would, or might, do, but what I will do. The river is not so far distant, and that will end it all and cover my disgrace."

"Will it? And what will then be said? You will be found, and the crime of the mother will fall upon the beautiful daughter;—no matter about the son, he is a nobody; but the daughter—"

"My God! You will drive me mad."

"Nonsense! I am here to save you—and myself."

"But, my child—"

"Me?"

"My daughter; you would not drag her down, would you? She is innocent and stainless—"

"Curse you!" and with a hiss the man seized her arm. "Is she any better than I? Are you not the mother of us both? Would you throw this stain, as you call it, in my teeth?"

"God help me!"

"I'll be all the help you need, mother dear. The sin of the parent falls on the child, you know, and since there is a stain I suppose I should not complain, as I had no voice in the matter. But, you are the responsible one, and you shall do your part to the end."

"What is my part?"

"You know well enough. I look to you for my support, and if you are going to fail me I will—"

"What will you do? If you drive me to it, I will denounce you as the murderer of Philip King—I swear I will do it! I will confess my own guilt, tell who you are, and rid myself of you by swearing falsely against you!"

"I supposed you would think of something of that kind, mother dear, but I did not do the deed, as you are well aware."

"No matter—"

"It does matter. You go back on me, and I'll drag that beautiful half-sister of mine down into the mud—by all that's mighty I'll do it!"

"You are worse than I ever dreamed. I am bound, hands and feet, and in your power. Do with me as you will, but spare her, oh! spare her! Would to Heaven I had never been born."

"But, you are, you see, and you must face the music. We have had a plain talk now, and you understand me. Go back to the house, make yourself known to Abner White, and pour out your story to him. He will forgive and aid you, and through him I shall be able to pull through."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A LEAF FROM THE PAST.

He lifted his hat with mock politeness, and left her.

The valise he had set down at her feet, but she did not notice it; she gazed after him.

What the thoughts of that crushed heart were did not come to the lips, but a flood of tears leaped from her eyes and a sob shook her frame.

Stooping, she picked up the valise and retraced her steps.

Coming again to the house, she hesitated, halted, passed on, but stopped at a little distance from it.

"I dare not, I dare not," she muttered. "He would carry out his threat; I know he would; for her sake I must bear it to the end."

Returning, she mounted the steps and rung the bell.

A servant opened the door.

"Mr. Abner White?"

She could not control her voice to add more.

"He is at home, madam. Will you step within? What name shall I tell him?"

"I—I have no name to give him— Tell me: do you think he would assist one who is in direst need of help?"

"If that is your errand, have no fear. Come in here, and I will tell him of your presence. He will at any rate hear your story, and if you deserve help you will get it."

"Stay! do not call him; I will go away—"

"Why, what—"

"Oh! I deserve nothing; I am the most miserable of creatures! I can hope for nothing—"

A tall, commanding form darkened the doorway.

It was a man of noble presence with a saintly face and hair of silvery white falling to his shoulders.

At sight of him Myra King uttered a scream and fell upon her knees at his feet, her clasped hands uplifted, and the servant hurriedly withdrew, closing the door.

"I came to you for help," the woman sobbed; "all I ask now is mercy—that you will allow me to drag myself from your presence—"

"Peace, madam!" the kindest voice. "In coming to me you come to one who is greater than I, whose humble instrument I am. If you believe on Him, fear not to confide in me."

The woman sunk down, and broken sobs shook her frame.

She had not raised her veil.

The man was silent for a time, and his eyes glistened with moisture as he looked down upon her.

As soon as she began to recover from the outburst, he touched her gently on the shoulder, bidding her rise and take a chair.

She obeyed, choosing one that was in a corner where a shadow fell.

Here she lifted her veil.

"I heard you say to the servant that you had come seeking assistance, and now if you will tell me in what way I can serve you—"

"I am undeserving, sir; it is for another that I ask it, indirectly. I have sinned, but she is as pure as the angels. For her sake, and for that alone, I have dared to come."

"How did you learn of me?"

"A man I met on the street told me something about you."

"Well, tell me your story. I will help you, if you desire help in the direction of right."

"But, I have sinned, and it is the punishment for that sin that is crushing me. There is a millstone around my neck that is dragging me down and down."

"It can be removed, perhaps. Confide in me."

"Could you forgive me, do you think?"

"As I have been forgiven. Years ago I did a great wrong, the weight of which almost crushed me, and which I can never hope to repair. But that very wrong made a man of me."

"You sinned!"

"Yes, miserably."

"It is hard to believe."

"No matter; tell me what I can do for you."

"First hear my story, and then if you think me in the right in asking aid, I will accept it."

"Proceed."

"Years ago I made the mistake of my life. One whom I trusted was false to me, and shame came upon me. I do not blame him; I take it all upon myself. My family turned me out from them, and I went away crushed."

The man before her clinched tight his hands.

She seemed not to see it.

"In a distant city my babe was born," she went on, "and I placed the child in the care of a woman whom I had been able to befriend, and whom I took to be my friend. I gave the boy his father's name, and sought to hide my shame by going away still further from my home, where no one could possibly know me."

"I worked, and regularly sent the woman the price agreed upon for the keep of my child. I did not want the boy to know who his mother was, but I did want to educate him, so that he could face the world when he came of age. That was the one object of my life, and for years nothing came between me and that object; and then, of a sudden, everything changed for me, and the prospect of my life brightened."

An honorable man asked me to wed him, and what was I to do? I loved him, in a measure, and he could give me a good home. But my past? If I confessed that to him, he would despise me and cast me off. If I kept it secret, it could do him no harm, and who could ever know? Those four years had seemed like four ages, and who would know me, even should any one chance to meet me? I gave way to the temptation, kept my secret, and became his wife. But my sin has found me out!"

"For twenty years I have been that man's devoted wife, and I am the mother of his daughter, a beautiful girl now nineteen years old. For twenty years I have lived

this lie in his life. But I have tried by every devotion to atone for the deception I played upon him. Do you think there can be forgiveness?"

"Your sin was no greater than my own—heavens it was not half so great!"

"But the end has come, now. My son, the child of my shame, is now a man, and he is everything that is evil, almost. The woman with whom I left him betrayed the trust I reposed in her. She somehow learned that I had married, and whom, and when the boy became of age she told him who his mother was, and, I suspect, put it into his mind to come to me with the demand for money. Be that as it may, he came, and for four years he has made himself a burden upon me. But perhaps the punishment is just."

"It has been severe, truly."

"You have not yet heard all. As I said before, the end has now come. I am desperate, and I would take my life if I dare—"

"Banish that thought instantly. You have no right to do that."

"The only thing that holds me now is my other child. My son has vowed that he will drag her down in shame, if I kill myself and so deprive him of support. What am I to do? But, I have not told you half. My husband's son has been murdered, there is some suspicion that I did the deed, and I have run away in order to escape arrest and the necessary exposure that would follow—the latter had the more terror for me. My son has followed me here, and is determined to hound me to the last. His demand is money money! My God! how can I escape?"

"He is of age; he has no claim upon you. The law will free you of him, if that must be the resort—"

"No, no; for he has sworn that he will declare me the murderer of my husband's son, and will prove it against me. He has me in his power, for I dare not face the ordeal."

"Are you innocent of that crime?"

"As innocent as you; I swear it."

"Do you know who did the deed?"

"I do not; I cannot imagine. I only know that it was a woman."

"Well, by running away you certainly have placed yourself in a bad light, but being innocent you have nothing to fear."

"I fear that man, my son. You do not know him. Now that I have left my husband he insists that I shall get from you the means to support him in idleness, but I made the resolve that I would confess all—"

"From me?"

"Yes; he counted upon your forgiveness, and—"

"My forgiveness?"

"Abner, my brother, do you not know me?"

She sprung forward and knelt at his feet, her face uplifted and the light falling full upon it, and, after one moment, he caught her to his breast with a glad cry.

"Myra! My sister! Can you forgive me?"

CHAPTER XIX.

SPRINGING THE TRAP.

RETURN we to Cool John and pard.

We left them in a desperately hard place.

An hour had now passed, and yet nothing had occurred to enlighten them concerning the scheme which they believed to be working for their injury.

They had remained as far as possible passive observers of what had been going on around them.

A few others had joined the company.

On the entrance of one of these the Big Bay gave Cool John a touch with his foot, being in position to do so without drawing attention.

But the signal was not heeded, for the Man of Sand, recognized the fellow, in spite of the attempt at disguise. It was another of the three who had undertaken to attack them on the previous night!

Cool John saw a stubborn resolve settle upon the countenance of his ally, and knew that the Big Bay was prepared.

Of a sudden the storm broke.

A woman who had been making herself

particularly friendly with the Big Bay sprung away from him with an exclamation.

"What's the matter?" demanded the man, the most evil-looking of the trio of the night before.

"That man has robbed me, that is what!" was savagely explained.

"I opine that's some mistake about that," asserted the Big Bay, getting up from his chair.

"There must be a mistake, surely," agreed Dick Nutter. "My friends here have means enough of their own, my good woman, without robbing you."

"I don't care what they have got," cried the woman; "he done it! Do you all think I am a fool?"

"Did you do that, Uncle Bill?" demanded Cool John, he also now on his feet.

"Of course I didn't, boy; you know better'n that."

"I swear he did!" yelled the woman. "I want him searched, and if he ain't got it I'll eat crow."

"How much money had you?" asked John.

"Fifty bones, wrapped in a little piece of newspaper."

"There's one way to set the thing right," spoke up the evil-looking fellow. "Let us search ye."

"Not by a durn sight! I am no thief, and the man that says I am had better git ready to back et up."

"Well, now, if it comes to that," retorted the fellow, "this woman is a friend of mine, and I will take her word quicker'n yours. We'll see whether you have got that money or not," and he took a step forward.

Cool John had put himself alongside the Big Bay on one side, and Dick Nutter was on the other side.

"Go a little slow here," called out Cool John, putting up his hand. "I guess Uncle Bill will be willing to show down and satisfy you that there is a mistake—"

"No mistake about it!" screamed the woman, now raging like a fury. "Didn't I see him take it? Didn't I feel him? Don't I know just where he put it— See! what do you call this?"

With a spring as quick as that of a cat she leaped forward, thrust her fingers into one of the Big Bay's pockets, and, although she was caught by the wrist, she was quick enough to bring to sight a folded piece of newspaper.

"You put it there," declared the burly Westerner.

"That is a likely thing, that I would put my money in your pocket! I don't have so plenty of it that I can give it away."

"I took you for a square man, Mr. Brown," said Nutter, with an injured air. "Don't blame me, friends; I have been deceived in him. I wash my hands of them both, now."

He moved away from Cool John and pard.

"We'll fix them out, curse them!" cried the worst-looking of the lot, one Gib Wilson, who leaped forward as he said this, and others with him, but the fist of the Man of Steady Hand sent him to the floor with a crash, while the Big Bay grabbed another and flung him clear across the room.

The next moment the pards had their guns in hand.

"Now, what are you going to do about it?" asked the cool sport. "Do you want any more of the same?"

The inmates of the room fell back, like so many voives from an attack with fire brands, and Gib Wilson and the other were scrambling up from their unheroic positions.

"You are a brace of thieves!" grated Gib.

"That's what they are!" chimed in the woman.

"The proof was too plain to be doubted," asserted Dick Nutter. "I have been sadly mistaken in you. It was a dirty trick, after the way I have been showing you around to-day."

"We understand all about that, and you understand us," retorted Cool John. "Or, if you don't, we will try to make ourselves understood. We know you, and some others here, and we have been waiting to see what your game was."

"What do you mean?" cried Dick.

"Just what I say."

"You mean to say that I have been against you?"

"Exactly."

"Well, there is gratitude for you! By Heavens, I have a notion to take sides against you! I had no idea that I had taken up a pair of cut-throats."

"The wonder is that they didn't go through you, too," spoke the woman.

"Mebby they have," another.

Dick Nutter clapped his hand to his pocket.

"By smoke!" he cried, "somebody has!"

"What have you lost?"

"Pocketbook."

"At 'em!" cried Gib Wilson. "We'll show 'em how we deal with their kind. We are square ourselves, and we don't show no mercy on them what ain't."

"You bet!"

But, all the same, they did not "at 'em" with anything of a rush.

The fact of the matter was, Cool John and his pard held the best hand, and the thugs were not blind to the fact.

"What are you going to do about it, now?" asked the Man of Sand.

"I demand my pocketbook," cried Dick.

"We have not got it."

"That's what your friend said about my money," reminded the woman.

"Or if we have got it," added the sport, "it is another case of the same kind, and it has been put in our possession."

"A likely thing."

"Well, call in the police and have us searched."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Gib Wilson. "I guess you don't know the kind of place you are in, do you?"

"About as hard a hole as I was ever in," was the rejoinder.

"And you couldn't get a policeman to come in here, unless you had three or four of 'em in a bunch."

"Well, then, we'll go to the nearest police station, and there you can make your charge and there the matter can be settled."

"I'll bet ye don't get these hyer galoots in no police station unless ye drag 'em there," avowed the Big Bay. "We understand their game, pard, don't we?"

"So I have told them."

"Will you give me my pocketbook?" demanded Nutter.

"With pleasure, if I have got it," answered Cool John. "Which pocket did you put it in?"

"How should I know what pocket you put it in, you Western thief? But we will know, before you get out of here, you can bet on that."

"Well, you may just as well open the ball," the sport invited.

"That's what's the matter!" echoed the Big Bay.

"We have been in worse corners than this, although never in such a rotten hole," added Cool John, "and we have come out all right. We expect to go out of here the same."

"Maybe you will tell us how you are going to get out?" growled Wilson.

He was smarting under the blow he had received and it could be seen that he was now fondling a black-jack he held in his hand.

The whole scheme, or nearly all of it, was transparent to the two men Out of the West, but it clearly had not worked as the authors of it had intended that it should.

The plan had been, to have a charge made against the two men, and for the crowd to jump on them before they could have a chance to defend themselves, and it might be that nothing short of murder would have been the outcome. But, they had run against some pretty stubborn snags.

CHAPTER XX.

A TOUGH STRUGGLE. A LESSON.

FOR the time being it was a deadlock.

On the one side the two Westerners; on the other the pack of human wolves at bay.

Cool John and his pard had their backs to the wall, and an attack would mean disaster for somebody, that was certain.

On the other hand, the wretched horde held the position of the door, and it meant a fight if the two friends expected to pass out that way. The center of the room was clear, save for tables and chairs.

Cool John was surveying the field, and the Big Bay was waiting for him to give the word what to do.

The Man of Sand soon had his plan formed, and said something to his ally in an undertone, after which he spoke, addressing the pack before them:

"Well, we have had about enough of this, and are going out of here. You will oblige us if you will clear that doorway. If you don't we will begin to clear ourselves."

"You will, hey?"

"There is no need for further parley; we mean business."

"And so do we. We don't allow two thieves like you to come in here and walk away with us."

"You have just one minute to get a move on you."

The women were already sneaking out of sight, and the rascals looked at one another questioningly.

The ringleader, Dick Nutter, seemed at loss what to do, and his right bower, so to call the man Wilson, was none the less so. They had a regard for their good health.

As for the two Westerners, they had counted the odds against them, and found there were just an even dozen men opposing them, to say nothing of the crowd in the main room of the dive; and the women having gone out, they would be apprised of what was going on.

"Come, make your decision," the sport ordered, peremptorily.

His guns came up a little higher, as did also those of the Big Bay, and it looked decidedly "nasty" for the thugs.

"You give up my pocketbook and we'll let you out," assured Nutter.

"If I have got it, I'll surrender it after we get out; I am not aware that it is on my person."

"Well, it is, and I mean to have it."

"Time is up; out of the way!"

Shoulder to shoulder the pards advanced a step, the glittering tubes of their guns in sighted level.

A couple of the fellows, who had never faced this kind of "music" before, made a hasty change and put themselves out of range, and others looked as if they would like to.

Another step.

The pack of human hyenas stubbornly held on.

Almost simultaneously a couple of shots were fired, and Dick Nutter and Gib Wilson were the targets.

Each of them got a bullet through the hat, so close to the quick that it fairly made them jump; at which the rest broke, and ran.

For the moment the two thugs fired at were as if paralyzed.

Then they suddenly "got a move on," and were out of the room as quickly as the rest had gone—Cool John and pard right at their heels.

The two Westerners now faced the horde in the main room of the dive, where the air was thick with smoke.

Heavy, sullen faces confronted them, in every direction, and they made the discovery that the front was closed—that wooden shutters had been put up.

"Open that front door," ordered the Man of Sand.

"We'll open nothin'," a man somewhere blurted out.

"And make room for us to advance," the cool sport added. "If you don't we will lay some of you out."

They strode forward, but, at that instant, the room was plunged in darkness!

Instantly the two desperate men began to shoot, not to kill, but just to give a whole-some warning of what might be expected.

And as they fired they made a dash for the front of the room, the only light being that made by the flash of their weapons. The situation was now desperate, and the sooner they got out, the better.

A hand grabbed Cool John's throat.

Instantly his revolver was dashed into the face of the owner of the hand, and the hold was broken.

The Big Bay, having emptied his guns,

now seized a fellow who laid hold upon him and dashed him around with giant strength, clearing the way with him!

About that time the sports' guns gave out, as the click of the hammers told, and instantly there arose a shout.

"At 'em now! Their weapons are empty!" and the rush was made.

It was now that the two Men-out-of-the-West fully realized their desperate situation.

There was no help for them, unless they could help themselves, and it was a desperate chance whether they could do that or not, now. They certainly could not reload their guns.

Even had they been loaded, it would have been folly to take life there, in the dark.

They had purposely avoided killing.

"Grit yer teeth, pardner," whispered the Big Bay.

"We must get to that door, somehow," responded the sport. "We can do it, if we keep together."

There was no time to say more.

Forward came the crowd, or, more properly, they closed in, for they were now in the center of the horde.

The men of the West put their backs together, and the Big Bay flung a strap around the body of his lighter companion, and thus they were buckled together!

It was all done in less time than it has taken to tell of it.

And it was then that Bedlam seemed to be let loose in that room, and imprecations were heard on every hand.

Back to back, as said, the fists of the two pards worked like the pistons of pony steam-engines, almost, and whenever a fist found a target, there was heard a cry or a groan.

Hands were laid upon them from every side, and they were roughly handled, but it was impossible to separate them, as the fiends found to their amazement. And in this manner they pushed their way to the front of the room, and found the door. But it was fast.

Voices were heard on the outside.

"Break in this door from out there!" called the Man of Sand.

"What is going on in there?" came the demand.

"It will be murder, if you don't act!"

"Open this door!"

"Break it in, I tell you!"

There came a pounding with a club, and at the same time the shrill call of a policeman's whistle.

Immediately there was a break in the crowd; men could be heard making a scramble to get out by the rear way, and the two pards found the pressure less around them.

The doors were creaking, under the pressure of a shoulder against them.

The Big Bay unbuckled the strap.

He and Cool John had now a better chance, and in another moment they could venture to draw a gun and load it.

That done, and a couple of shots fired, they had the whole field to themselves, and in another moment the doors moved under the pressure and came crashing open.

The light of the street shone in, and three policemen were revealed.

Instantly they laid hands on the Western sport and his pard, demanding to know what it was all about.

"We got into this place, and they tried to fix us out, that is all," the cool sport explained. "They have taken leg bail and have made their escape."

"Well, you are our prisoners," cried the officer. "Don't ye resist, or the worse it will be for yez. This is a respectable place, and you must have been up to some devilment. Come along wid yez!"

But they did not have to go far. Something was slipped into the policemen's hands, and the prisoners were allowed to slip out!

CHAPTER XXI.

SQUARELY IN THE FACE.

THE reunion of the brother and sister, Abner White and Myra King, was most affecting.

For some moments they were silent; then the woman gently broke her brother's embrace and turned her tear-wet face to his.

"You ask my forgiveness?" she questioned. "I came here to implore yours."

"I have nothing to forgive, my sister."

"But the shame—"

"Worse shame was mine, when, in my fancied righteousness I turned away from you in your hour of direst need. Can you forgive me for that?"

"I deserved it all, Abner. It was more than I merited. But, oh! if you have forgiven me; if you will only be my brother as of old, and aid me now—Abner, do not turn me away!"

"Nothing is further from my thoughts, Myra," kissing her forehead. "Get up, now, and let us talk the whole matter over calmly, and see what is to be done. You may count upon my help, though I cannot possibly do more for you as my sister than I would have done as a stranger."

"Yes, you can take me into your home."

"True; and I will. This is the happiest hour of my life, my sister. If you could only know the misery that one act of mine brought me—if I could only picture it to you. In less than a day after I had turned you away I repented, and sought you. You were not to be found. What had been your fate? My God! how I shudder at the recollection of the days, the weeks and the months that followed!

"I searched everywhere, but you had utterly disappeared. I believed that the silent river had carried you away in its dark embrace, but how was I to know? I pictured a fate far worse than that, and held myself responsible for it. My remorse changed the whole current of my life. I saw clearly what a whited sepulcher I had been, and my whole soul turned unto good works. By doing good unto others I hoped in some measure to make reparation for the wrong I had done to you."

"And what of Paul Batford?"

"He is dead, died a miserable death. He stood in mortal dread of vengeance at my hands."

"Well, thank Heaven my sin has brought good, through you, to some others as wretched, perhaps, as was I then—as desperate as I was when I entered your doors to-night."

"I will say yes, and to many, though I do not allow my left hand to know half that my right hand is doing. God has rewarded me by restoring you to me again, by sending you to me in this distress that I may prove to you a brother's love. But, tell me your story."

This she did, filling in all that she had omitted before.

He listened, with bowed head.

"Again I thank God," he said fervently, when she had done. "He heard my imperative prayers in your behalf, and raised up a friend and home for you, and for many years you have been comfortable. Now it only remains to clear up this mystery, break the power of Paul Batford's son, and restore you to your home. Myra, that is my work, and I promise you that it shall be accomplished."

"Thank God that I had the courage to come to you, my brother!"

"Now, let us see what is to be done."

"That is more than I can tell; I am utterly helpless."

"In the first place, I must have an interview with your son and try to reason with him."

"It will be useless."

"You think so?"

"Yes. I have tried that too often."

"Perhaps he will listen to me where he would not heed you."

"And if not?"

"Then we must compel him to desist from troubling you. But he will be glad enough to come to terms, I imagine."

"He is wicked and desperate."

"No matter; he can have no further power over you when once your husband has been told your secret. And the mystery of the murder—that will be cleared away, all in good time, I am sure."

"You believe me innocent of that?"

"I ask for no proof of it, for myself; your word is sufficient."

"God bless you!"

"You have told me everything you can?"

"I have."

"There is no idea in your mind as to who killed your husband's son?"

"Not as yet."

"Your daughter could have no reason for doing the deed?"

"No, no; she is as innocent as I am myself. Do not suspect her, Abner, I implore of you!"

"Then your son—"

"I could suspect him, but there was the hand in the window. And then, Paul could have no motive for the deed."

"Well, well, it is truly a mystery, but detectives can solve it, and I will put one on the case immediately."

"And you will tell him all?"

"Everything."

"It is better so. But, my daughter, where can she be?"

"That was the reason I questioned her innocence so closely, for what reason could she have in disappearing?"

"I cannot imagine."

"It looks dark for her, for that reason."

"But, she is innocent, I can swear that she is innocent. You must convince the detective of that, or he will waste time looking for her."

"It will be useless to try to bias the judgment of a good detective. He will take the matter as it appears, and will work accordingly, following all clues to the end."

"And do you intend to write to my husband?"

"You must do that. Confess to him in full, declare your innocence of this crime, and there stop. Do not ask pardon; let your letter appear as if he were never to hear from you again."

"And give your address?"

"Certainly."

"And what if his whole nature turns to hatred against me, and he sends the officers here to arrest me?"

"He may do that, or he may not; that remains to be seen. In either case you will have done your part, and you will feel free from the burden of the lie you have been living."

"But, they may suspect my daughter."

"There is nothing to fear, if you are convinced of her innocence."

"But, how can I prove it?"

"Can they prove her guilty?"

"No; impossible."

"Then rest easy. But, now about that man who was arrested, and who escaped from jail so wonderfully. What do you think of him?"

"I know very little about him."

"He had no motive for the crime?"

"Not that I can think of."

"Your daughter loves him?"

"Yes; she had admitted that."

"And believes him innocent?"

"Yes, again. She is sure of it."

"Do you think she can have run away with him?"

"Ha! I had not thought of that. But, if she has—Heavens! these dark thoughts!"

"They must be faced. But, you are tired out; you must have something to eat, and then retire to your room, which I will have the servant prepare for you. Rest to-night, and to-morrow we will act."

"How can I thank you?"

"By forgiving me for the wrongs in the past."

"Gladly would I do that, were there anything to forgive, believe it."

The servant was summoned, the stranger introduced, and the directions given and carried out.

An hour later Abner White was pacing the floor of his library, his hands behind his back, his white head bowed, and tears glittering in his eyes.

We have learned his story; comment were needless. Such men there are, in this vicious, malevolent city; as there are also men of the opposite extreme, many more in number, veritable human wolves.

CHAPTER XXII.

ANOTHER HAND IS SEEN.

LET us enter a room where a cabal of rascals have just come together for a conclave.

There are several of them, some about as evil-looking fellows as can be well imagined, and nearly all wear the marks of a recent hard scrimmage.

"Well, you are a pretty-looking lot, I must say!" he cried. "A dozen of you against two, and to come off like this—Ha, ha, ha!"

"Curse you! maybe you could have done better," one of the majority growled. "We will see that you have a chance at it next time. We thought we had them dead to rights."

"But, you hadn't."

"It's their accursed pistols. Our boys here are not up to that kind of business."

"And they got off?"

"If the police didn't nab them. Nobody waited to find out."

The first-quoted speaker was he who had been the ringleader of the trio of the previous night.

Then there were Dick Nutter, Glib Wilson, Webb Harker, and others of their class. The first speaker was called Henry; his last name remained yet to be revealed.

"Well, we must talk business," this Henry now declared.

"That was what was talked before!" growled Nutter. "And to think how I worked to make a success of it!"

"It would have been a go, only for them pistols," averred Wilson. "We ain't bullet-proof, and if they had the bulge on us they had it, that's all."

"How did you carry it out?" asked Henry.

"We didn't carry it out, that was the deuce of it."

"I mean, what was the scheme?"

"Well, we expected to lush them, if we could, but that didn't work. Then it was fixed that Dirty Kate was to kick up a muss and we were to wade in and knock them stiff in no time."

"And even that failed?"

"Do the boys look as if it was a howling success?" demanded Nutter.

"They don't, that's the fact. But the job has got to be done, somehow, and that before twenty-four hours pass."

"Maybe you will tell us how."

"When the disease is desperate, the remedy must be the same. If this man remains alive and free a couple of days, goodbye to everything! He must be taken care of this night!"

"Yes; but how?"

"He will go again to the hotel, and two of you must spend the night there. You know his room, Nutter, and it will not be impossible to get into it. The gas can be turned on, and in the morning there will be another sensation for the papers. The countrymen and the fatal gas again!"

"That is a mighty good plan," asserted Nutter.

"And she will carry it out?"

"I will. I know the clerk there, and can get a room next to theirs, if one is vacant."

"All right; we'll leave it to you, and it is to be hoped that you can make a success of it. If you don't, there will be some other way, and I want you boys all to hang together until the thing is done."

"You bet!"

"Well, Nutter, be off, and remember how much is at stake."

"Not likely that I'll forget that. If we had thought of that last night the work would be out of hand now."

"Yes, I believe it would."

So, the fellow called Nutter, more than ever eager to get even with the Westerners, took leave of the rest and was gone.

The others got down to business, then, in an earnest talk, which we will not pause to record, and finally, when the hour was growing late, they separated.

Let us follow the one named Henry.

He went to a certain street and number, rung the bell, and was admitted without question.

Ascending the stairs, he tapped lightly at the door of a certain room, and the door was opened by a rather bold-looking but decidedly handsome woman.

"You!" she exclaimed.

"Exactly; better late than never."

"But, it was getting so late that I did not look for you."

"Well, I am here, as you see."

"Come in."

He entered the room, and the door was closed.

"I have been waiting for you," the wo-

man continued, "but was on the point of giving you up. What do you know?"

"Well, it fizzled. The pair got away with the whole gang."

"Impossible! Why, who would have thought? But, that man has got a name out in Denver."

"He will have one here, if we can work it, and then it will be Dennis."

"They call him the Man of Sand."

"Well, they are not far wrong, I'll swear. But, Dick Nutter is after them now, and if they get off this time it will be queer."

"After all, what is the use in bothering with them? What harm can they do us?"

"Well, Nutter seemed to think they could do a good deal."

"I fail to see how, for my part. How could they get a clue that would put them on the right track?"

"How did they get a clue to lead them to New York, for here they are, as large as life, and mighty dangerous?"

"Have you seen your mother?"

"Yes, and I persuaded her to remain idle one day, at least, but she will act to-morrow. She believes in striking while the thing is warm."

"All the same, I wish she would wait. Can't you induce her to do so?"

"No, that is out of the question; she has made up her mind, and that settles the whole business. That is the main reason why we wanted to wind these fellows up to-night."

"It would be too bad to have it fizzle out now, Henry."

"Well, I should say it would. Nothing but love could have induced me to run the long risks I have taken."

"I can well believe that, my darling!"

They embraced, and for a few minutes their talk took a softer turn.

"Well, I must be going," the man said, presently. "I knew you would be anxious to know all about it."

"Dare you trust me to try my hand at it, if he should escape from Nutter to-night?" the woman inquired.

"I hate to say yes, Ann."

"Give me your consent, and I'll bet I can wind up his career."

"But, think of the danger if you should miss the mark, or if you should be found out if you hit it."

"I am willing to take all the risks."

"Well, I'll see about it. It will be time enough to lay further plans if Dick fails."

Further plans would be necessary, for Dick Nutter was destined to fail. He spent the night at the — House, but the two Men-out-of-the-West failed to put in their appearance there at all.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A CASE FOR THE COURTS.

ON the following morning, at fashionable breakfast time, two persons were seated together at table.

They were mother and son, and the latter was the man, Henry.

"No, Henry, I will not wait another day," the woman was saying.

"It will be better to have everything clear before the move is made, and this man is a big obstacle."

"I thought you had more brain, more nerve," the woman sniffed disdainfully. "I am almost ashamed to own you for a son of mine. What care we for obstacles? We are independent."

"Yes, that is all very well, but this escaped prisoner ought to be lodged in jail again before we act; then there would be no further looking for some one on whom to put the murder."

"Sh!"

"Yes, I know it is an ugly word."

"And one not to be mentioned. Take care not to speak it again."

"What have we to fear? We have done no murder."

"Heavens!" in hoarse whisper. "Will you keep still?"

"Why should we keep still? Can't we talk about a thing that has been a sensation in the papers?"

"Yes, but it is dangerous—"

"That is the very point, mother. It is dangerous for you to go to that lawyer until some one has been found guilty of that crime."

The son spoke now in a low tone and most earnestly.

"What do you mean? What had we to do with the death of Philip King?"

"Nothing, to be sure; but, somebody might take it in hand to make trouble for us, and no one would be more likely to do so than this very escaped prisoner."

"But while I wait time is being wasted," she urged.

"That need not matter; you can say it just reached your notice, even if it is a month hence."

"That will be a likely story. It would look ten times more suspicious for me, then, than now while the matter is fresh. In fact, I am sorry that I have waited at all."

"Then you are determined?"

"I am. In less than one hour I will be at the lawyer's office."

"Well, if that is your decision, we must all play accordingly. I only hope it will come off all right."

"How can it work any other way?"

"I have no more to say, then. If you dare take that risk, you will dare to do anything."

"Do you think that I will allow anything to come between me and a sweet revenge? I guess not! I will take the first steps this very day. Now, let us glance at the thing as it is: I learn by the news of this matter in the papers where my former husband is. He has never been divorced from me, and you are his heir—"

"And that is the ugly point in it all, mother."

"That is the golden point, you mean, rather. You will enter your claim to recognition, and he cannot get out of it."

"Well, and what then?"

"Why, it will outlaw this second marriage and the fruit of it, and you will stand alone as heir to Roger King's fortune, don't you see? Why, that murder was the most fortunate thing in the world, for us."

"Where do you come in?"

"You could not come in at all, only for me, could you?"

"That is true enough; but suppose, after everything is established, I should throw you over?"

There shone a glint of fire in the woman's eyes.

"It would not be well for you to try that," she declared. "Even if you are innocent of this thing, it would not be impossible to make you appear guilty. Bah! that thought."

The matter was dropped for the remainder of the repast.

In about one hour after, this same woman entered the office of a lawyer and handed her card.

"Mrs. Irene King," the lawyer read.

"And I desire to retain your services, sir," she said, promptly.

"Very well, madam, if I can serve you, I will gladly take your case in hand and render you whatever aid I am capable of giving."

"You will allow me to give you a retaining fee?"

"It is customary, madam."

She handed him a crisp note.

"Now let me have the particulars," he requested. "What is the nature of the case?"

"I will tell you my story, and you will be able then to see it as a whole. I am not posted well in your legal terms."

"Very well."

She took some newspapers from a handbag which she carried.

"Have you read anything about that mysterious murder case at Denver a few days ago, sir?" she made inquiry.

"I have," with some surprise.

"Well, my business concerns this Roger King, the father of the murdered young man."

"Indeed?"

"Further, that murdered young man was my son."

"Ah-ha!"

"About twenty-six years ago I was married to Roger King here in New York, and he was in business here at that time. We had two children, Henry and Philip, the latter being the younger."

"I follow you, madam."

"Well, about two years after the birth of

the second child my husband deserted me suddenly, taking the youngest child with him, and I have never seen him since; and I never heard of him again until his name appeared in the papers in connection with this crime."

"Exactly. Proceed, madam."

"When he disappeared his affairs were found to be in bad shape, and he left me almost penniless. I was nearly crazed with grief for him and my baby boy. I have never since married, because, first, I had no desire, and in the second place I felt that I had no right. I believe I love Roger King as warmly to-day as when I gave him my hand and heart."

"It is an interesting story, madam."

"Well, now that I have discovered my truant husband, by chance, I want to see if he cannot be made to recognize me as his wife, and his son as his rightful heir. I seek only justice, and that on account of my son. You see, sir, he is now living with another wife, according to the story the papers give, and has a child by her; but I consider that my rights still hold good, and I desire to have the case pushed and see what can be done."

"It seems to me, madam, that you have a case against the man and his estate. I will ask you some questions, and if the answers are satisfactory, will proceed in your name according to law."

An hour later the woman left the office, with a very satisfied expression.

The way evidently seemed clear.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PAUL BATFORD'S SCHEME.

THERE are villains and villains.

Villain Paul Batford was one of the worst of his class.

On this morning Paul was abroad at an early hour, enjoying a walk in the bright morning air.

He wore a satisfied look upon his face, as his keep was assured for a few weeks, at least.

He had no business worries, further than that of making his future a certainty.

While he walked along, lightly swinging his cane, he came suddenly face to face with a young woman, who caused him a start.

"Blazes!" he muttered, as soon as he had passed her, "if it isn't my handsome half-sister! What in the deuce is she doing here? And she has just arrived; her appearance shows that."

It was, indeed, Rosa King!

She looked weary and travel-worn, for she had just reached the city from the West.

She carried some wraps and a light handbag, and as Paul stopped and looked after her, a villainous scheme sprang suddenly up in his mind.

"It will never do to miss the chance," he said to himself. "She appears to be uncertain about anything, and if I can place her in my power I will have the joker in my hand and can't lose the game. No, sir, Paul Batford, it will never do to miss it!"

He turned and followed the girl.

At the next corner she stopped, looking about her with uncertainty.

The rascal was not far behind her, and stepped forward at a lively pace, and slightly jostled her.

He stopped immediately, lifting his hat.

"I sincerely beg your pardon," he said, with all the politeness he could assume.

"Freely granted, sir," she responded, with a slight inclination of the head, and a gracious expression.

He seemed as if passing on, but stopped, again lifting his hat.

"Are you uncertain about your way?" he asked most civilly. "Are you a stranger here? Can I direct you?"

Not that he knew the city any too well himself, but he had been there before, and a good general idea of the lay of the land was fixed in his mind.

"May I trouble you to direct me to — street?"

"I am going right there, and it will be a pleasure to conduct you, if you will give me that privilege."

The offer was so humbly made that she could hardly have refused it.

"It will be a great kindness," she said, simply.

He took his place by her side.

"May I not carry some of your wraps?" he offered.

"Oh, no; I would not trouble you so far, sir."

"No trouble at all—"

"I prefer to carry them myself."

"May I ask to what part of — street you desire to go? What is the number you want to find?"

"It is No. 942."

"Ah! that is right in my way, and it will be a pleasure to see you safely there. You appear weary; have you just reached the city?"

"Yes."

"If you had rather not talk, I will not speak again."

"I shall not object to your talking, but I am afraid I would be sorry company even for an acquaintance, just now."

"I did not want to bore you, that was all."

"You are thoughtful."

"You are from the South, I take it?"

"You think so?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"By your speech I know you are not a native of this city."

"Indeed! I was not aware that there is anything noticeably different, so far as I have any acquaintance with New Yorkers."

"It is so slight as hardly to be noticed. But, am I mistaken?"

"No, I am from the South, sir."

He smiled to himself, at this. It was plain that she desired her identity to remain out of sight.

"And may I inquire what part of the South?"

"I am from Virginia."

And so they talked on, Batford's brain busy trying to hatch a scheme whereby he could place this girl in his power.

"Well, we are nearing the end of our walk," he finally observed.

"And I shall be glad to have reached the end of my long journey, provided I find my friend at home."

"Then you are coming on a visit to friends who are not expecting you? Well, I certainly trust you will meet with no disappointment, Miss—with no disappointment, certainly."

"Thank you, sir."

"Do you expect to remain long in the city?"

"That I cannot tell."

"The reason I ask, will you be averse to an introduction, if I can by some means bring it about properly?"

"I would not refuse it, sir, certainly, if you would care enough about it to take that trouble to secure it. But, you would hardly be repaid for the bother, I feel certain?"

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it could be no more than a passing acquaintance."

"Even that would amply repay me, no matter how great the trouble. May I mention my name?"

"If you please."

"It is Howard Elmore."

"Not an easy name to forget, Mr. Elmore."

"I am glad to think so."

"Why?"

"It is proof that its owner may be held for a time in remembrance also."

"I shall certainly remember your kindness, Mr. Elmore. And now I will grant what you are delicate about asking—my name is Flora Fielding."

She had been trying to think of a suitable name, and this came to her mind from a romance she had recently read.

"A name I shall never forget!" exclaimed the rascal. "It was impossible for me to ask it."

"And yet you knew how to place me under obligation."

"I could not resist."

"Well, say no more about it, Mr. Elmore. We must be near the desired number, are we not?"

"Yes; only a few doors more."

"Well, permit me to thank you for your kindness."

"I have been more than repaid, Miss Fielding. I trust you will find your friends at home."

"Undoubtedly I shall."

"And here is the number. Permit me to say *au revoir*!" politely raising his hat. "I trust that we shall meet again."

She inclined her head in response, and ascended the steps, while he passed on.

"I have got her," he chuckled to himself. "It will be easy for me to decoy her from there, if I have need to do so, using the name of John H. I am on the winning side, as sure as fate."

CHAPTER XXV.

MAKING A NEW START.

ONCE well out of the terrible den into which they had allowed themselves to be conducted, and out of the hands of the police as well, Cool John and the Big Bay consulted over the situation.

"Wull, hyer we alre," the Big Bay drawled.

"And with whole skins, I guess," added the sport. "That was a pretty stiff encounter."

"Et wull do, pard; we have been in wuss. Thar was no barkers makin' music but ours, an' I guess we made all they keered to hear. What's ther next move?"

"We have got to change our tactics."

"How's that?"

"We are too well known, one thing."

"Mebbe you are right."

"I know I am. We have got to disguise, now, for further service."

"All right; I'm in et."

"And we have got to change our place of roosting, too. They will spot us again if we go back there."

"Kerreck."

"We'll go straight to another hotel, and in the morning we will make a complete alteration in our dress, and see what can be done. It seems like a day wasted, almost."

"And so et has been."

"Yes, in one respect, but not altogether. We have got the proof, now, that they are after our lives."

"There wasn't much doubt about that afore to my mind, but now thar ain't a mite o' doubt. They are after our gore, sure enough, and they mean real ole business, too."

"Well, they have had a sample of our goods anyhow."

"An' they will be more wary."

"Yes, and more subtle, too."

"Nary doubt."

They sought another lodging place, as agreed, and retired for the night.

As they had left nothing in their former place, and had paid in advance, they had nothing to call them there again.

On the following morning they were astir at an early hour, and Cool John summoned a messenger, to whom he gave a dollar as an incentive to good service, and sent him forth upon an errand.

In due time they had a caller.

"Mr. Jones?" the man asked, on coming in.

"Yes," said Cool John.

"Well, I represent the firm of Rich, Price & Co., to whom the messenger delivered your message."

"As I supposed. We want you to take our measures and send us a complete outfit apiece, ready made, immediately. We have just reached town, and cannot go out until we make ourselves presentable."

"I understand."

"Here is a hundred dollars on account; make all the haste you can, and give us your best service."

The caller smiled a smile that could almost be heard, for it almost tinkled with satisfaction. And he proceeded to business in a way that meant business and that he knew his business.

Within one hour he had performed his part satisfactorily, and had received his money.

When the pards of the West next appeared on the street it would have been hard to imagine them the same persons. Both were shaven clean, and doubtful if even Dick Nutter would have known them.

They wore neat business suits, with everything else new and in style, and in appearance they were typical New Yorkers.

"Now, Big Bay, one thing," said Cool John.

"What's that, pard?"

"That is just it—your Western dialect. It has become chronic with you, I know, but just as far as possible you must put it under."

"I see, bo, I see. I'll try hard ter—I mean to lay et—I mean it off ther same—I mean the same as I have the old clothes Thar, how was that? Think I will pass muster?"

"You will have to get it a little finer than that, if you do."

"Well, I'll try to. There ain't much Wild West about us now, I reckon, save your sand and my muscle, and our guns."

"That is what we aimed for, anyhow."

"Well, what now?"

"A visit to that address."

"Sure enough."

"That was the clue that brought us here, you know, and it must not be overlooked. Mind, now, no broad dialect."

"I'm trying to mind it. But, I expect it will slip out at the wrong time. I was glad we got hold of that clue, and now if you can only get a sight of ther gal—I mean the lady."

"Yes, that will be a long step in the right direction, I fancy."

They talked as they went along, and finally came in the neighborhood of the place they had in mind.

It will be remembered how this address had been learned, by the Big Bay, and that they were in quest of the woman who had been the last one to see Phil King alive, so far as known.

That was, the last save the murderer.

It was agreed that Cool John should go on to the house alone, while the Big Bay would wait a little distance off.

The sport went forward.

To this time he had been puzzling his brain as to what he should say when he had summoned some one to the door, and even yet he had not been able to decide.

There was no name he could ask for, for he had simply the two letters—A. S., and the street and number, and it would never do for him to go upon that alone. That would awaken suspicion.

The Big Bay, watching, saw him pass the house.

"Wull, I ber durn," he said to himself, dropping into the easy vernacular. "What does that mean?"

He watched his partner for a few minutes, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing him turn back again and mount the steps. He did not think far enough to guess what had been the reason.

"Must 'a' passed the number," he reflected.

"Now, Pard John, let's see what you will make out of et all."

Cool John had struck an idea.

In passing, he had noticed a small strip of white paper pasted just outside the door on the bricks.

He had been in New York long enough to know that these tiny slips, looking like a speck of white court-plaster on a red face, mean almost invariably that there is a room to let or a boarder wanted.

In this instance both.

He read the notice before ringing the bell. It set forth that a large room, suitable for two gentlemen, was to be let.

A servant answered the summons.

"There is a room to be let here?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir."

"I would like to see it, find out the terms, and so forth."

"Just wait, then; I will call Mrs. Cross."

Cool John had stepped into the hall, and the servant closed the door and disappeared.

In a few minutes a woman of middle age made her appearance, a grim look upon her face at first sight, which melted away as soon as she saw her caller.

Cool John's clothes and appearance won respect for him.

It is said that clothes do not make the man, but in New York they go a mighty long ways toward that end.

The sport detective repeated the observation he had made to the servant.

"Yes, the best room I have," the woman declared. "It is on the next floor front, if you would like to see it."

"I would."

"Go right up, then."

The room was a good one, well-furnished, and the result of a ten-minutes' parley was that Cool John engaged it.

"Your lodgers are all gentlemen?" he then asked.

"No, I have two ladies, sir; two very respectable ladies, sir. Why did you inquire?"

"I had no object, only that I thought you did not take ladies at all, owing to the fact that your notice outside specified that this room would be let to gentlemen."

"For the reason, sir, that ladies, as a rule, cannot afford to take such an expensive apartment. When shall I expect you, sir?"

"In the course of an hour, perhaps."

CHAPTER XXVI.

COOL JOHN SCORES A POINT.

COOL JOHN took leave and joined his pard. He had met with little success, and yet with considerable of success, too.

Not knowing the name of the woman he desired to get on track of, his only way was to get sight of her; and in no way could this be accomplished so well as by becoming an inmate of the same house for a time, and in this a kind fortune had greatly favored him.

"What luck?" demanded the Big Bay.

"Not much, but a beginning."

And Cool John explained to him.

"That's good enough, if we kin carry et out, and mebbey you kin all right, but as fer me—"

"You have got to choke off that twang of yours. But, then, I have made it a little easier for you, I think, now."

"How is that?"

"I have given this woman our names as John Green, Senior and Junior, of Vermont, in town for a couple of weeks to see the sights."

"What has that got ter do with et?"

"It will give you a chance to give your dialect a little play, that is all. The people we meet are not likely to know the difference, you see, between the two, and you will be safe."

"A durn good idee! But, ain't we togged out 'most too well?"

"No, for our clothes will show for just what they are; it will be seen that we have fitted out anew."

"And when are we going there?"

"In about an hour."

They strolled up the street together, to kill a little time.

Ere they had gone a great distance Cool John suddenly caught the Big Bay by the arm.

"Do you see anything?" he asked.

"Wull, I ain't stone blind," was the drawl.

"See that man ahead there?"

"Yes."

"Who is it?"

"Give it up."

"Think hard, now."

"I tell ye I give et up, boy."

"Never saw him before?"

"Don't believe I ever did. Who is et?"

"Well, I may be mistaken, for that swell stride is not his natural gait, but if that fellow isn't Paul Batford I'll treat."

"By thunder!"

"You agree with me?"

"Et's him fer dust, pard."

"I don't think we can be mistaken. The whole set have come here to New York, by the looks of things."

"What will you do?"

"We'll watch him."

And this they did!

Had they been ten minutes sooner, and had they encountered the fellow in another place—which double proposition could not have been fulfilled, they would have seen, also, Rosa King.

They followed after the man, who walked with as important a swing as though he owned half the city.

He did not look around, evidently having no thought that anybody was following him.

His destination, finally, was a respectable-looking house, in a respectable street, where he rung the bell, and after a few seconds was admitted.

The detective pards waited for his reappearance, but they waited in vain. He did not come out again, although they hung around a couple of hours. In fact, something had happened to Paul Batford.

This was the residence of Abner White, the just man.

Weary of waiting, at last, Cool John and his pard took note of the street and number and went to their newly-engaged place of lodging.

Here "John Green, Junior," introduced his father, and they repaired to their room.

It was coming on to meal time, now, and as Cool John had spoken for meals in the house whenever they happened to be there, it was their plan to remain and get a sight of the other lodgers.

When the hour came and the bell sounded in the hall, they went down.

Mrs. Cross pulled chairs for them as they entered her dining room, at the same time saying

"Mr. Green and son, of Vermont."

This was her habit, "in order to make her boarders at home," as she put it.

Cool John inclined his head slightly, and took the place assigned to him, and as he did so he could hardly repress a start.

Directly opposite to him sat the woman of the Phoenix—the woman who had been in conversation with Phil King so short a time before his death, and who had given him her name and address.

He did repress the start, however, so far as any outward show of it was concerned.

It was she, the same cold, handsome woman.

She looked at Cool John sharply for a moment, but he paid no attention to it, and she turned away her eyes.

There was another woman, an old lady, at the board, who, on hearing that the strangers were from Vermont, immediately broke out with an exclamation of delight.

"Dew tell!" she cried. "Aire yew from Vairmount?"

This caused a broad smile among the others present, which broadened when the Big Bay responded:

"That there is whar we hail from, ma'm."

Cool John saw trouble ahead, unless he could avert the danger.

"I take it that you are from the same State, madam," he said, quickly. "May I ask from what part?"

"Well, neow, yew have guessed right; that is where I am from; but, how could yew tell? I am from up Burlington way."

Cool John had more or less knowledge of the whole country.

"We are from near Bennington," he said.

He thought if he placed them well apart—the two places, there would be but little danger of running against snags in local description.

"I know Greens aplenty up our way, too," said the old soul.

"Yes, they are all over the land," averred the sport. "May I ask how it comes that you are so far from your native soil?"

This gave the old lady a chance, and she rattled away with a story that of no interest to us, but which proved of service to Cool John and his pard in firmly connecting them with Vermont in the minds of the other boarders.

Cool John listened attentively to the old lady, occasionally offering some remark, but for the most part his attention was secretly given to the woman opposite to him.

The Big Bay had little to say, but his occasional remark was so broad that it added strong weight to the evidence.

As soon as they were again in their room Cool John gave him a terrific slap on the shoulder:

"What yer doin'?" the Big Bay growled.

"Want ter loosen my teeth?"

"We have struck it—struck it rich!" cried the sport detective, in undertone. "You saw the woman opposite me?"

"You bet."

"She is the one we are after."

"The deuce ye say! See hyer, pard, she's too durn handsome—"

"Softly, now, Big Bay. I don't care if she is sprouting the wings of an angel, she is the person who killed Phil King!"

"What?"

"Take it easy, but store it away deep. She is the one who killed Phil King, and I have proof of it."

"Proof?"

"Exactly. But, the question is, how to bring the crime home to her."

"What ther durnation is ther proof? I

be hanged ef you ain't got me all in a sweat, now, sure enough."

"The proof is, that she is left-handed. Didn't you take notice how she was eating? Well, I did, and we are on the right track. And that old lady, bless her simple old soul! she has covered us over so thick with Vermont plaster that suspicion cannot touch us. Shake, Big Bay!"

Cool John put out his hand, and the Big Bay gave his.

They had indeed struck the trail!

CHAPTER XXVII.

INTRODUCTION UNEXPECTED.

PAUL BATFORD made a bold move when he went to the house of Abner White.

But, he considered it a safe move, for two reasons—perhaps three, to be more exact.

In the first place, he believed that he had his mother entirely in his power, and could do with her as he pleased. Then he considered Abner White a sort of mild lunatic.

Best of all, he had Rosa King in his power, or what he believed amounted to the same thing.

He felt himself strongly intrenched.

Ring the bell with a firm pull, he gathered himself together, so to say.

When the servant came to the door he made inquiry for Mrs. King, the lady who had arrived there the previous evening.

"Yes, she is here, sir," was answered.

"What name shall I say?"

"Tell her it is Paul; she will know me."

The brother and sister were together in a little sitting-room just off from the library.

When the servant entered and made the announcement, the poor woman turned as pale as death, for a moment, and clutched her hand to her side.

Abner White, too, was pale, but he said calmly:

"Show him in here, Martha. He will find Mrs. King alone."

"Yes, sir."

The servant withdrew.

"I will step behind this *portiere*," spoke the brother, then, hurriedly. "I will hear him talk to you, and when I step into the room you will introduce him boldly as your son."

There was no time for response, and Mr. White immediately concealed himself behind the heavy curtain.

The next moment the door opened, and Paul Batford stepped in.

He looked all around before speaking.

"Are you alone?" he asked.

"You can see that I am," was the response. "Why have you come here? Was it not enough that you saw me yesterday?"

"Well, no; that was hardly enough, mamma dear. Then I merely directed you what to do; now I have come to see if you have done it. I hope everything is all right?"

"Yes, everything is all right."

"And that canting saint has forgiven you, I suppose."

"Paul!"

"There, don't flare up about it; he must be either a fool or a hypocrite, I am certain. No matter."

"My brother is neither one nor the other, Paul Batford. But, it is impossible for you to understand, much less appreciate, a nature like his. Yes, he has forgiven me, fully."

"Excellent! If I can't appreciate his nature I assure you that I will know how to appreciate his pocket, when you tap that for me."

"I hope you will."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say."

"Do you hint that you are going to go back on me?"

"I mean that it is high time that you began to appreciate something, for one thing, your own position."

"Ha, ha! Why, it is my position that is giving me all this concern. I appreciate it fully, I can assure you of that, dear mother. But, have you begun to feel the way?"

"What way?"

"To pull his leg."

"What are you talking about?"

"Confound it! I mean have you begun to lay a plan that will open his pocketbook for us?"

"I have not."

"Well, it is short notice, of course. But,

the sooner you make a beginning the better. Do you want me to suggest a plan?"

The woman was silent.

She wanted her brother to step in and take the matter in hand.

"All you have got to do is to pretend that there is a certain somebody somewhere badly in need of help, and the good Samaritan will fork over the ducats in a hurry. I have no doubt."

"And do you think that I would stoop to that?"

"Maybe you have a better plan?"

"I have no plan."

"But you must form one. I may need money before the month is up, for New York is an expensive place."

"What will you do for money when I am dead?"

"You are not dead yet. Plenty of time to think about that when it happens. I am looking out for the present."

"Well, Paul, I am going to speak plainly to you."

"That so?"

"Yes."

"Well, let's hear it."

"You have had the last dollar from me that you will ever get."

The fellow's lip curled with a cynical smile, albeit a certain degree of pallor appeared.

"Is that so?" he drawled.

"It is so."

"I think you are mistaken, mamma dear," he declared. "I have not only myself to keep, but another as well, and you must put up the needful."

"Another to keep—"

"Yes."

"You are married?"

"Ha, ha! Hardly that, thank you. But my handsome half-sister is boarding with me, and it will require—"

The woman had sprung to her feet, face blanched, and staggered toward the villain who was thus torturing her. She had to grab a chair for support.

"You—you do not mean—"

"Oh, yes, I do. Rosa is right here in New York, under my care, and it all depends on you. I have no doubt your pious brother will come to your aid, if you put it to him in the right light."

"But, that child, you would not harm her—"

"Not a hair of her head, if you give me the wherewith to provide for her. If not, she will have to take her chances."

"In heaven's name, bring her here to me, Paul."

"Well, hardly. What you will not do for me for my own sake, you shall do for me for her sake."

"Where is she? At least tell me that."

"Yes, I will tell you that, certainly; in fact, I have told you. She is in this city."

"And you have made her your prisoner?"

"Well, I scarcely believed you would think so evil of me as that; I am protecting her. You see, she is hiding from the officers of the law, who want her on the charge of killing—"

"Great heavens! But, she is innocent, Paul, she is entirely innocent of that crime!"

"How do you know that? Was my first guess correct, that you can be so positive?"

"I am not certain that you, yourself, are not the guilty one."

"I can best answer that; I am not."

"Can you prove it? What if I call the police, turn you over to them, and declare you the murderer?"

"You could not prove it, and I defy you to do anything of the kind. You would not dare to do it, for you are in hiding yourself and dare not let your identity be known."

"Don't be too sure about that."

"I am positive of it, dear mamma. And now I will take my leave. In one week from to-day I will call again."

He rose as he spoke, but at that moment a door was heard to open and close, and Abner White thrust aside the *portiere* and stepped into the room, stopping short on seeing a stranger there.

"Brother," spoke the woman, making a supreme effort to speak, "allow me to introduce my son, Paul Batford. Paul, I will make you known to Mr. Abner White, my brother, who has befriended me in the hour of my direct need and forgiven my folly of the past."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

REPENTANCE PRETENDED.

PAUL BATFORD looked as if he wished the floor would open and take him in.

This was one of the surprises of his life, and one for which he was entirely unprepared.

And yet, no sooner had it been sprung upon him than he realized that it was just the very thing that he ought to have been prepared for in coming there.

"Paul Batford," spoke Abner White, stepping forward, "give me your hand. As I desire to befriend your mother, so I will befriend you, if you prove worthy of my friendship, and I trust you will."

The manner of the man was so frank, and the surprise of the rascal so great that Paul had given his hand before he knew it.

But it was given without that hearty grasp which honesty makes natural.

"I—I am glad to know you, sir," the rascal faltered.

"Then pray sit down, if you were on the point of going, and let us have a little conversation."

"I should like to, sir, but as I was just telling mother, I have a pressing engagement. I shall be pleased to call again, sir, at some other time—"

"Paul," interrupted the mother of the wretch, "I have concealed nothing from my brother; lying will not serve your purpose now. If you are not a fool you will give him attention."

The fellow's face flushed, and confusion overcame him.

He saw that he was in a trap.

"I am pained to think that you would lie to me," said Abner White, "but that can readily be pardoned, under the circumstances. Sit down, and we will have a plain talk and see what is to be done. I am not willing to believe there is no good in you, young man."

"I don't know that I have any need of your advice," was the sullen response, as the rascal moved toward the door.

"Perhaps I can give you more than advice," was the rejoinder. "Maybe I can give you such substantial assistance as you need. This may be the turning point of your career."

"I am much obliged, I am sure, but I don't think I'm in need of your help, sir. When I want it, I'll come again."

He laid his hand on the door and would have opened it, but to his surprise it did not yield.

His face blanched, and he looked startled.

"You may sit or stand, just as you choose," said Abner White, with provoking calmness. "For the time being you are my guest. I think you will find it more comfortable sitting."

"Have you locked me in here?" the fellow demanded.

"The door is locked."

"I demand that it be opened immediately, sir."

"Your demand will not be heeded. You are my guest or my prisoner, just as you please."

"I am, eh?"

"You are."

The two men looked into each other's eyes.

The younger man was wild, excited, almost desperate; the elder was calm and masterful.

"If you will listen to reason, will repent, and will try to make a man of yourself," the elder continued, "I will be your friend. If you will not, but persist in wrong-doing, then I will deliver you up to justice."

"What do you mean by that? What have I done?"

"It is not for me to say what you have done; you know that better than any one else."

"Then what charge can you make against me?"

"I will make no charge. You are wanted at Denver, and there you will no doubt be given a fair trial."

"I am innocent of any crime there."

"I hope you are."

"I swear that I am, sir."

"Have you any idea who did that deed?"

"I know who did it."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Who did it?"

"My mother here. I saw her do it."

"Paul, you know that you lie," spoke the woman, calmly.

"I know that I tell only the truth. I was too close at hand to be mistaken. I will swear to it, if I am pressed. You had better allow me to depart, I give you fair warning."

"You cannot go, sir," said Mr. White. "Or, if you do, you go forth a prisoner. Your power over this mother woman, your mother, is broken forever, and it only remains to be seen what fate will be yours. We are ready to befriend you, if you will have it so."

"You are lying to me?"

"I do not lie."

"You know I am desperate, and for that reason you want to keep me here a prisoner. But, you can't do it."

"We care no more for you than for a cur on the street," declared Mr. White, "so far as fearing you is concerned. But if you will allow us to befriend you, we will do that."

"What can you do?"

"If you will give me your word, sir, that you will turn over a new leaf and be an honest, industrious man, I will do what I can toward placing you on your feet so that you may become self-supporting and respectable. Undoubtedly you will never have a better chance."

Batford was doing some lively thinking.

He saw that he was in a bad situation, and that something must be done to get out of it.

For some moments he was thoughtful.

"I am afraid it is too late to try that," he said, presently.

"It is never too late."

"Yes, but here I am cornered, and if I turn it will be because you have forced me to do so. What confidence will you have in me?"

"I will begin by having confidence in you, sir, and the longer I find that my confidence is not misplaced the stronger it will become and the better will be my opinion of you."

"Will you take my word for one thing?"

"I will, if you declare it to be true."

"I swear that it is true—that I did not kill Phil King."

"Then I hold you to be innocent, and nothing but proof of your guilt will convince me otherwise."

"Thank you, sir. And now let me confess something else. I am not sure that it was my mother who fired that fatal shot on that night."

"Bless you for those words, Paul," murmured Mrs. King.

"But, you saw who did the deed?" asked White.

"Yes, but not the person's face, sir. I only know that it was a woman."

"Well, it would place you in a bad fix if it were known that you were there when the crime was committed."

"I am aware of it."

"And your desire is to repent and begin anew?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well, let us see what can be done for you. But, you will have to remain here till that can be thought out."

"But, my child?" cried Mrs. King. "Tell me about her. Where have you put her, Paul? Tell us that, so that she can be brought here to me. Do this, and I will fully trust you."

"There, too, I must ask forgiveness," said the rascal, sinking down upon a chair with an air as of being crushed. "I know nothing about her."

"You know nothing about her?"

"Not a thing."

"Then you were—"

"I was lying to you. By that means I hoped to get a firmer hold upon you, and make you the more eager to give what I demanded. As I am at the end of my rope, I may as well confess the corn."

"Miserable man that you have been!" sighed Abner White. "But, by your confession you in a measure make amends, and give us reason to trust you."

"I do not want you to trust me, sir, till I prove myself."

"We will give you every chance to do that. Here is your mother, almost broken under the load you have heaped upon her, but she has mailed a full confession to her husband, so your power would be broken anyhow."

Batford was taken a little aback by this bit of information, but his mind as quickly rose equal to the emergency with further scheming. If his mother had taken this step to free herself from his power, all the more reason why the daughter should be made to yield him a handsome ransom.

He played into the hands of his mother and her brother for the time being, and remained in the house as a guest.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BANKER KING'S RESOLVE.

In the mean time, what of Rosa King?

Paul Batford had watched long enough to see her enter the house, and he rightly guessed that she had found her friends.

Applying at the door, she had asked for Cynthia Dean, and being informed that she was at home, entered and gave her name, which was carried to the person in question.

Presently a young woman burst into the room into which Rosa had been shown and ran forward with a glad cry.

They embraced, and Rosa burst out crying.

"Come right to my own room," said her friend, leading her by the arm. "There you can tell me whatever you have to say, and no one shall see you until you are calm."

She carried the handbag and wraps, and led her friend up-stairs.

"I had no one else in the world to go to," Rosa declared.

"And I am glad you thought to come to me. I have read all about it in the papers, dear."

"But, you do not believe it was I?"

"Assuredly not."

"Indeed, it was not; but, I have taken this step in order that they may think that I did the deed."

"In order that they may deem you guilty?"

"Yes."

"What can you be thinking about?"

"I have done it to protect mamma."

"Mercy! you do not believe she killed him, do you?"

"Far from it, Cynthia; but, others think so, and I want to draw their attention from her."

"What an awful mystery it is! But, have you any idea who did the deed?"

"Not the slightest."

Their tongues rattled as only the female tongue can, while Rosa bathed her face and made her toilet, after her journey.

By the time that was done she was more like herself, and she and this friend had come to an understanding. She was to remain there as her friend's guest as long as she desired.

The two girls had been chums at a seminary, and their friendship was strong.

Rosa had told her friend everything.

"And what is going to be done, now?" Cynthia asked, when they settled down to finish their private chat.

"I do not know. I am lost completely."

"You have no idea where your lover is?"

"Not the slightest."

"And you are sure of his innocence?"

"Positively."

"It will certainly look dark for you, and your object will no doubt be accomplished."

"That is as I desired. I must remain in hiding until the guilty one has been discovered, so that it will in a measure draw attention from mamma."

"But, what of your father?"

"I pity him, he will be so lonely."

"You love him?"

"Dearly."

"But you did not like Philip?"

"I did not; he was not true. I could not trust him."

"And now that he is dead you are the only heir, and that makes it look all the worse."

"Yes, yes; I have thought of all that, but I do not care; if mother and I can only

remain out of sight till the mystery is cleared."

"What do you think was her object in going away?"

"She had a double reason, one part of which I must not tell you, since the secret is hers. The other, I suspect the same object as my own."

"To draw attention from you?"

"Yes."

"I fear that you both have done foolishly."

"Do you think so? I know you always had a clear head at school, Cynthia; what is your reason?"

"My reasons are good. Suppose the real murderer can not be found; all this will go toward fastening the terrible crime upon you and your mother, one or both, and what can you say?"

Rosa was pale.

"I did not think so far as that," she confessed.

"And then, by drawing all attention to yourselves, you are diverting it from investigation in other directions, and so lessening the chances of getting at the bottom of the terrible affair."

"Can you tell me what I ought to do?"

"As to that, you will have to give me time to think. But, now that you are yourself, let us go down and I will introduce you to my mother, who will be as eager to befriend you as am I."

And thus Rosa King found herself in the hands of good, true friends for the time being.

But, the wolf knew of her hiding-place.

For the moment let us take up the thread at Denver, where our romance had its beginning.

The funeral of the murdered young man had taken place some days before, and Banker King was the only one remaining of his household, save the servants.

Detectives had been at work constantly, upon every clue that offered, and one of them, Coughlin, had gone to New York, upon a slight clue that pointed in that direction.

The banker was in his library, sad and broken, when the morning mail was handed in to him.

He opened his letters mechanically, having no spirit for business.

But suddenly he straightened up, interested.

The letter he had just opened was postmarked from New York, and the very first line he read chained his attention.

It ran as follows:

"ROGER KING:—

"Will you allow a stranger to suggest a clue to the mystery surrounding the death of your son? I have read all about it in the papers, and it seems to me the detectives must be blind if they cannot see the point. You had an only son and an only daughter. The mother of your daughter was not the mother of the son. With the son out of the way the daughter would fall heir to all your riches at your death. Who would have an object in putting him out of the way? Why, the mother of the daughter, of course, or the daughter alone, or both together."

The banker's face grew ashy as he read these words, and he clinched his fist as his arm lay on the edge of the table.

He continued to read:

"Have you not seen enough of their characters to believe this? A daughter who would deceive you as yours has been doing, meeting at night with such a man as the one who was arrested; and a wife who had a familiar acquaintance with men of known bad repute around town! It seems to me that there is only one thing to be done, and that is, to find the mother and the daughter and hang both of them for the crime, and then you cannot make a mistake."

"COMMON SENSE."

Even after he had reached the end, the banker sat and stared at the letter as if still reading, but he could not see the writing for blinding tears.

Suddenly he sprung to his feet, flinging the letter to the floor.

"It is a lie!" he hissed. "It is a black, a

damnable lie! I will not give it a hold upon me, for it is untrue. After twenty years of steadfast devotion—No, by heavens, never!"

The lion of his nature was aroused.

He put the letter in his pocket and prepared for the street, and having done so summoned his butler.

"I am going away," he said. "I may be away for some time. You will carry all my letters to Detective Conners, at Police Headquarters, until my return. Do you understand?"

The butler said he did.

Some minor directions, and the banker left the house.

In a little while he was at Police Headquarters, where he found the man he wanted, Conners.

To him he showed the letter, saying nothing except to bid him read it, and when he had done so the detective silently handed it back again, saying nothing himself.

"Well, why don't you say what you think?" demanded the banker.

"Mr. King," was the reply, "it is just what I have been forced to think for some time. I hate to say it, but I fear there is truth in it."

"I don't blame you," said the banker, then, "but I do not agree with you. I am going to New York to ferret out the writer of this. All my mail will be brought to you. Open my letters and forward any that bear upon this case. All the rest deliver to my secretary at the bank."

With just time to catch a train, the banker was out and away, leaving the astonished Conners to stare after him.

CHAPTER XXX.

DETECTIVE COUGHLIN'S CLUE.

A FEW days passed quietly.

It seemed as if both sides were gathering strength for the coming struggle.

But, such was hardly the case, for one side was for the time being worsted, if such a term be allowable.

We refer here to Henry King, Dick Nutter and their tools, who had lost the scent of their game and were beating around wildly trying to strike it again. The two men from the West had disappeared.

During the meantime, Cool John and the Big Bay were quietly keeping an eye upon the suspected woman, Ann Spader, as they had learned her name to be; and were likewise paying attention to the house of Abner White, into which they had seen the man Batford disappear.

Paul Batford was "lying low," to make use of the slang phrase, enjoying the hospitality of Abner White while he concocted further schemes for his own benefit. It was far from his intention to enter into any manner of honest labor if he could avoid it, for he did not take kindly to the thought of earning his bread by the sweat of his brow.

Mrs. King was there, of course, awaiting the coming of some word from her husband, and the daughter, Rosa, was still at the home of her friend, Cynthia Dean.

This was the situation when Roger King reached the city.

He had telegraphed ahead to Detective Coughlin, whose address he had, and was met at the train.

"What news?" he immediately asked, as the two shook hands.

"Not a word," was the answer. "What news do you bring? Something important must have brought you here."

"It is nothing in the way of news, strictly speaking, but it is something that may be the means of giving you a clue. I have received a letter from New York."

"Hal!"

"Here it is."

The banker put the letter in the detective's hands as they made their way to the ferry.

"Why do you think this may be a clue?" Coughlin asked.

"Because I believe in the innocence of my wife and daughter in this matter, and think this has been written by some one who desires to injure them."

"Who can that person be?"

"I know not."

"The writer of this strikes a chord that gives out a full sound."

"I can't help admitting that, sir, looking at it from the practical stand-point, but I know my wife and daughter too well."

"I hope you are not mistaken in them."

"I feel certain that I am not."

"How do you account for their mysterious actions?"

"Are you going to insist that this letter is the key to the truth of it all?"

"No; I am seeking to get at the truth, and want to see the matter the same as you see it. But, perhaps we had better defer further talk till we reach the hotel."

This was agreed upon.

The banker engaged a room in the same hotel at which the detective was stopping, and there they took seats and resumed the conversation.

"Now, where did we break off?" asked the banker.

"I asked you what you thought of the mysterious actions of your wife and daughter."

"Their disappearance?"

"Yes; and these points raised in the letter."

"I do not understand them, therefore cannot explain. But, I am willing to give them the benefit of every doubt."

"Let us glance at the daughter first. She would benefit by the death of your son, of course. But, that aside. Let us try to clear away the suspicion if we can. She had a lover."

"Yes, as you know."

"And that was a secret from you. Why?"

"Because, as I look at it, it would have been opposed by me had I known it."

"Good enough. As I know the man, I will say that he was in every way worthy of your daughter, or any other man's. I hold him to be innocent of the crime; likewise you your daughter."

"Exactly."

"I can explain the disappearance of the one; accused of the crime, falsely, I believe he is trying to solve the mystery. Now, what of the other?"

"It has been suggested that perhaps she has eloped with this fellow."

"Not so, for John Handy is not that sort of a man, even if your daughter were so inclined."

"You think not?"

"I am sure of it. I had rather think that the daughter has gone in search of her mother."

"Well, possibly you are right, but if so, why would she keep it a secret from me? If that is the case, I do not like the looks of it, for it would appear as if she thought her guilty."

"That is the way it looks. Now, your wife would love her own child more than she could love your son. The death of the son would place the whole of your fortune to the credit of the daughter, prospectively. The son was murdered, and your wife has mysteriously disappeared."

"Still I hold her to be innocent."

"How, then, do you explain her sudden leave-taking?"

"I don't explain it; that is what I expect you to do, if you are able."

"Looking upon her as guilty, everything is plain sailing; as innocent, we are at sea."

"And that being the case, we must look around us the best we can, get our bearings if possible, and sail for the shore."

"And you want me to take this letter as a clue?"

"I want you to find the writer of that letter, and I think it will test your ability as a detective."

"Yes, I rather think it will, Mr. King. We have no clue whatever to begin with, and I would defy you to tell me whether this was penned by a man or by a woman."

"I want you to find out."

"And you have nothing to suggest?"

"Nothing."

"Well, I think it would be folly for me to undertake any such task. In the first place, the letter has a genuine ring. It strikes me that some person has taken it into his or her head to write a letter, and that is all there is to it, since the view taken of the matter is a sensible one, from a disinterested point of view."

"You think so?"

"I do."

"And you will not aid me, then?"

"I am here to do all I can, but I must stick to my own outline of work."

"What brought you to New York?"

"I came here looking for Paul Batford, having a clue that he came here when he left Denver. By finding him we will get at the truth, perhaps."

"You hold him to be guilty?"

"He may be; cannot say. But he will be able to explain what business your wife had with him, and that will be the means of clearing her, if innocent; or of—"

"You need not finish. You have not found him?"

"I have not."

"And you have lost the trail?"

"I never had it to lose; I am looking for a trail. All the clue I have is the faint one that Batford came here, and it is my business to find him, if he did. I am making a thorough search."

"Well, I am going to find the writer of this letter."

"Yourself?"

"With your help, if you will give it."

"Which I will, gladly enough, as soon as the way opens; but, that is a harder task than the finding of Batford."

"It may be easier."

"Why?"

"Hold that sheet of paper up to the light."

The detective did so, and saw a faint water-mark of peculiar form.

"The mark?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What of it?"

"What of it? I will tell you: Over twenty years ago I was in business in this city, and this very paper is paper that I had in my office. It is paper that was made for me. I had a quantity of it at one time. The water-mark, you see, is a monogram composed of R and K."

"A clue, as I live!" exclaimed the detective.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TURN OF THE WHEEL.

NEW YORK had a sensation.

On the morning following the arrival of Roger King, and his interview with the Denver detective, a man was found insensible on the street near a certain hotel.

He was unknown at first.

There was a mark on his head, showing where he had been struck down, and it was the wonder of all who saw the wound that he had not been killed outright. There could be no doubt as to the intention of his assailant.

The victim was taken to the hospital, where his identity became known by some letters in his pockets.

The man was Detective Coughlin, of Denver.

A reporter found out more concerning the man; that he was a detective, and that he had come to New York in the interest of the King sensation of Denver.

Cool John and his "pard" were at breakfast when they learned about it.

The sport detective was glancing at the morning paper, when suddenly he muttered an ejaculation and read something with interest.

"What is it?" asked the Big Bay.

"A fire in Boston," answered Cool John.

"Man I knew when I was there lost his life in it."

"Dew tell!"

This was one of the phrases the Big Bay had picked up from the prattle of the woman from "Vairmount."

As soon as they had gone to their room, however, he there demanded to know what it really was that had claimed the attention of his "pard" and caused him to utter the exclamation.

Cool John read the item.

The Big Bay gave a prolonged whistle.

"The bell is open in earnest, durn me ef et ain't!" he cried.

"You are right," agreed the sport detective. "That is the fate that was intended for us."

"You bet; but, et didn't work accordin' to the way they wanted et to. Thar is one thing purty certain, an' that is, that we know who done this job. What ef we put ther police onto 'em?"

"It would be a good idea, but it might block our own game."

"How is that?"

"Why, the fellow would have to keep shady, and we would not be likely to get much good out of them."

"I guess you are right, pard."

"But, there is one thing we can do."

"An' what's that?"

"Go and see Coughlin."

"Not a bad idee, but only one had better go, and you must be that one," the Big Bay advised. "I will stay in while you are gone and try to hold things down here."

"Very well, and I will go at once."

They parted.

Cool John set forth immediately, and in due time was at the hospital to which the knocked-out detective had been taken.

He made known his errand.

"The man cannot be seen," he was informed.

"But, he was a close friend of mine," the sport insisted.

"Can't help that; he can't be seen. That is the order for the present. But he is unconscious anyhow."

"Will he live, think you?"

"It is about an even chance, is my opinion."

Cool John was just turning away, when he came face to face with Roger King.

The banker had come there on the same errand, having learned of the detective's misfortune by the same means.

The sport recognized him at once, but he in turn was not recognized.

His change of appearance in dress, and the loss of his mustache, made a different man of him.

He loitered near while Mr. King was making inquiries similar to his own, to which the same responses were given, and as the banker turned away the sport detective addressed him.

"Was that man a friend of yours?" he asked.

"What man?" asked the banker, looking at him.

"The man you just inquired for."

"Yes, sir, he was—and is."

"The same with me, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Detective Coughlin, of Denver, was my friend, and I want to find out who served him this shabby trick."

"And who are you?"

"My name is Green. Suppose we have a talk, if you don't object? Perhaps we can get at the thing, somehow, and by so doing get at the man who did the deed."

"What proof have I that you are what you claim to be?"

"What have I claimed to be?"

"Coughlin's friend."

"Well, I do not happen to have proof at hand, but if you write to his people at Denver, Colorado, they can give you the assurance."

"Are you from Colorado?"

"I have been there."

"What is your business?"

"I am a detective, sir."

"Detective?"

"Yes."

"I will talk with you. If you are telling the truth, you may be just the man I want to know, and if not, you may be just the man I want to get hold of."

"I hope I may be found the former."

They had passed leisurely out of the hospital main entrance, while speaking, and they did not observe a man who was watching them from a little distance as they made their appearance.

"Where shall we go for a talk?" asked the banker.

"Anywhere. We can stand right here, if that is agreeable to you, sir."

"It is not, for, if you are what you claim to be, our talk may be of some length. Will you come with me to my hotel?"

"I will."

Thither they repaired, and on the way Cool John revealed enough to satisfy the banker.

The sport detective knew, of course, what business had brought Coughlin to New York, and it secured the banker's confidence when he mentioned some of the leading facts.

"Now, sir," Mr. King demanded, "do you know who I am?"

This as soon as they reached the hotel and were seated in the banker's room.

"How should I know, sir, any further than you have seen fit to disclose to me?" was the counter question.

"Well, then, I will tell you: I am Roger King, from Denver."

"Indeed!"

"The fact. What is more, the poor fellow Coughlin met me yesterday on my arrival and I placed a new clue in his hands regarding the case. Who, do you think, can have struck him down?"

"Must have been some of the rascals he was working against."

"That is what I think, too. Now, sir, have you the nerve to take up the matter and carry it on?"

"Nothing would be more to my liking, sir. It is my intention to hunt down the rascals who tried to kill him, and if at the same time I can do anything for you, I will gladly do it."

"What reference can you give me?"

"The chief of police. I will go with you to his office, if that will satisfy you."

This was a bold move to make, for, to carry it out, Cool John would have to disclose his identity to the chief, and that might work to his disadvantage.

But, it carried as he thought it would.

"Say no more," said Mr. King. "I will give you the whole matter, in all its particulars, as far as anything is known to me, and you can begin work at once."

Fortwith, then, he went over the whole ground, telling the whole story, coming down finally to the clue which he had placed in the hands of Detective Coughlin only the day before.

"Coughlin said it was a complicated case," remarked the sport detective, "and now I can fully agree with him that it is. But, I think it is a plain one, for, in my opinion that fellow who was first arrested must be the murderer, or he would never have run away."

Cool John wanted the banker's opinion concerning himself.

"I think you are wrong," said Mr. King.

"I have come to agree with the detectives that he is innocent, for they speak highly of him. And, since I have thought it over well, I know nothing to the discredit of the young man. But, the end will reveal that. Now, to business."

CHAPTER XXXII.

A GLEAM OF LIGHT AHEAD.

"Yes, to business," agreed the man of sand.

"What have you to propose? You have asked nothing of Coughlin's plans."

"His plans did not work, save ill to himself. There was something wrong, or he was misfortunate."

"Well, your own, then."

"I must ask some questions."

"Ask them."

"But, first, a word of warning to you, sir."

"And what is that?"

"It is this: The same hand that struck down Coughlin may beseech opportunity to serve you in the same manner."

"That is what I fear."

"It is a wholesome fear. You must be on your guard."

"I intend to be."

"Take care not to go out after night, alone."

"My intention."

"And let nothing decoy you into any other part of the city, no matter what the pretext."

"I had not thought of that. Glad you have warned me."

"And that is about all you can do. Be watchful; for, bear in mind, the same person who killed your son may desire to put you out of the way."

"You think so?"

"It may be so."

"Then you think this letter was a decoy to get me to New York?"

"No; the wording of it is proof that it was not intended for any such purpose."

"What then?"

"To throw the more suspicion upon your wife and daughter."

"Then you hold them to be innocent?"

"I believe your daughter to be as innocent as I am myself, and I hope we may prove your wife the same."

"Both are innocent."

"We will look at it in that light, sir."

"Well, the questions?"

"Are concerning your past. You say this letter is written upon paper you had made for your own use years ago."

"Yes."

"Into whose hands did it pass when you left the city?"

"Impossible for me to tell."

"Then it is a faint clue indeed. But, I must know something of your history, Mr. King."

"Question me."

"You formerly lived here in New York."

"Yes; I was born here, sir, and here started in business. I married here."

"Your first wife."

"Yes."

"And she is dead?"

"I don't know."

"Ha!"

"The fact of the matter is, I left her."

"Well, well, here begins to appear a skeleton in the closet, I should say."

"Yes, but it is one of the past, sir."

"They always are, if you will stop to consider. Who was this first wife? Why did you leave her?"

"Her maiden name was Hazmore. She was a perfect termagant, or turned out to be such, and life with her was unbearable, for I am a man of peace. Besides, she ruined me financially."

"She was the mother of your murdered son?"

"Yes."

"Had you any other children?"

"Yes, another boy, two years older than Philip."

"What was his name?"

"Henry."

"Is he living?"

"I know not, sir."

"Well, your second marriage—that was—"

"Legal? Yes, it was that, certainly. I secured a divorce, according to law, and married again."

"Have you ever heard of this first wife?"

"Never, since I bade her farewell one fine morning and started for the West."

"Then you know absolutely nothing about her, whether she be living or dead, or anything concerning your other son?"

"Absolutely nothing, and never desire to."

"Did you leave them destitute?"

"On the contrary, I turned everything over to my wife, save the sum of two hundred and fifty dollars in cash."

"But you said she had ruined you."

"The wind-up must have netted her some thousands, after selling the little property I left her."

"And you set out to begin life anew?"

"Yes."

"And you succeeded?"

"Yes, thanks to the help of my second wife."

"Mr. King, this is a puzzling case, look at it as you will. You seem to have full confidence in your second wife."

"With the best of reasons, sir."

"And that reason—"

"Long association."

"And yet it is as plain as day that she has some secret from you."

"Why do you think so?"

"Her action after the discovery of the murder. She went into the city, secretly, and there had an interview with a fellow of bad repute."

"Yes."

"Next, she disappears."

"And what do you suspect, from all that?"

"What I have said, that she had a secret from you, and further, that this fellow had some power over her."

"I see we think about alike."

"That is your idea?"

"Yes. Further, I believe he has been draining her of money."

"Ha! have you grounds for that suspicion?"

"I have."

"What are they?"

"In spite of increased drains upon me, my wife grew to be almost shabby, and did not dress becoming her station."

"Are you quite sure you do not underrate the needs of a woman?"

"Only a few years before both she and my daughter had dressed better and entertained a great deal more upon far less money."

"You spoke to them about it?"

"Once or twice."

"What answer?"

"That I did not know the thousand and one ways in which money had to be laid out. And, I had to admit that it was true; still, that did not solve the problem of how they had previously lived better on less."

"Your providing was generous?"

"To a fault. It was what ruined me in the first instance."

"And it might have ruined you again?"

"Oh, no; I have a solid foundation now."

"You have no idea what that secret can have been?"

"Not the slightest."

"I think your daughter must have got hold of it; in fact, it seems pretty certain that she did."

"Why do you think so?"

"The mother would have to explain in some way, when the curtailment began to be felt, and perhaps she confessed. If that was the case, mother and daughter have in all probability gone away together."

"And in that case—"

"In that case, if we find one we shall find the other. But, it is more important, just now, to get on track of the murderer, if possible; for, with you, I believe that both your wife and daughter are innocent of the deed. I intend to put forth every effort, Mr. King."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

PLAYING A CLEVER CARD.

THE interview was a lengthy one.

Cool John learned all he could, trying hard to pick out of it a definite clue to the whole.

What information he got was fragmentary, however, and with that he had to be satisfied. But, he believed that he now held the key to the situation.

He did not leave any address with Mr. King, but promised to call again in as short a time as possible, or to write if necessary, and in that case a private token was agreed upon so that no decoy could be employed.

When he left the hotel his mind was busy with the case.

It did not occur to him to observe whether he was being followed or not, and in fact he had no suspicion.

And even had it occurred to him, he possibly would have failed in detecting the man who was shadowing him, for he was an artful fellow, the equal of the average detective.

The man was Dick Nutter.

For some days, as we have shown, he and his ilk had been beating around to pick up the scent of their lost game, and at last they were on the trail again.

Needless to pause to explain how; to go no further back, the news of the discovery of the almost-murdered detective was enough of itself to give them a clue, and watching at the hospital they were likely to discover his allies.

So, at any rate, had they reasoned, and we have seen with what result.

Cool John proceeded straight to his lodging-house to consult with the Big Bay, and the shock to Dick Nutter, on seeing him enter that house, can be imagined.

The fellow stopped short, completely knocked out of time, and had to mop a sudden outbreak of perspiration from his face. The discovery was one that almost paralyzed him for the moment.

He knew who lived here, of course, and realized that while he had been trying to find the Western pards they had been all the time on the track, and no telling what important discoveries they had made. The situation was more desperate than ever, now.

Cool John and the Big Bay had not been idle.

They had learned that the room occupied by Ann Spader adjoined their own, but there was no connecting door.

During such time as they had positively known her to be out of her room, they had made a hole through the wall, high up and behind a picture so that it would not be likely to be discovered.

In their own room the two detective pards had made this hole about six inches in diameter. The hole through into the other room, however, was no larger than a nail might make. I had been cut with greatest care, and being lower than the larger opening, it gave a view of the floor space to a great extent.

To this time it had brought them no result.

When Cool John entered his room on this occasion, however, he found the Big Bay mounted upon a table with his eye glued to the opening.

Each had a latch-key to the room, and as the Man of Sand came in his burly ally held up a finger cautioning him to silence, and Cool John knew immediately that something important was going on.

The Big Bay got down from his perch.

"We are onto 'em at last, pard," he excitedly whispered.

"Who is there?" asked Cool John.

"That chap they call Hennery."

"Ha! is that so? I think he is my game, Big Bay."

"You do?"

"Yes; but no time to explain now. What have you been able to hear them say to each other?"

"They have been sayin' perliete things about us, and it seems that they have been all at sea tryin' ter locate us, an' now they think they have got us to rights once more."

"They do, eh?"

"Yes."

"In what way?"

"In a way we orter have thought of."

"And what way was that? Come, talk up lively, old horse!"

"Why, they have set a man ter watch ther hospittle ter see who will visit that detective—"

"Great Scott! Just kick me, will you?"

"An' you have jest come from there."

"Worse than that, pard. But we may give them the slip yet. Get ready to leave here at once. Gather up our effects while I take a squint through the hole in the wall."

Cool John leaped lightly to the table, almost without a sound, and applied his eye to the opening.

The Big Bay proceeded to carry out his directions.

The Man of Sand saw Henry King and Ann Spader sitting close together, in low-toned conversation.

He had been looking but a moment when the door opened suddenly and into the room stepped Dick Nutter, his face wearing an expression of excitement.

Cool John immediately applied his ear to the opening.

"What the deuce is up?" he heard the man Henry ask.

"The devil is to pay!" cried Nutter.

"That accursed detective is lodging in this very house!"

"What?" from both the man and woman, excitedly.

"It is the fact. I got onto him at the hospital; he went to the — Hotel with Roger King, where he remained a good while, and from there direct here."

"And entered this house?"

"Yes."

"What does he look like?" asked the woman.

Nutter gave a hurried description of the Man of Sand as he had seen him.

"Mercy!" the woman exclaimed. "They have been right here all this time. Is it possible that they know—"

Cool John took a hasty look upon the scene.

All three were upon their feet, their faces white and full of fearful apprehension.

"Of course they have," cried Henry King, as the sport applied his ear again. "What else would bring them here? But, we have got them in their death-trap, for they cannot suspect that we are onto them."

The Man of Sand smiled grimly.

"They are known here as father and son," the woman explained. "They have the name, John Green, senior and junior, and

they claim to be from Vermont. Who in the world could have suspected them? What is going to be done, Henry? The situation has suddenly grown desperate."

"We must get out of here, unseen, and then entrap them, somehow," was the hurried response given. "Where is their room?"

"The front room here, right adjoining mine."

"Thunder!"

"And they are both in their room now?" demanded Nutter.

"I don't know; I never hear much of them, except the sound of their voices at times."

There was silence.

Cool John knew they were listening.

He glanced to see what the Big Bay was doing, and found that he was ready to depart.

Leaping lightly down from the table, not waiting to hear more, the Man of Sand gave his ally the cue and they opened the door and passed out.

As silently as shadows they descended the stairs, and as silently left the house, unseen. And that done, they made their way with all haste to the nearest corner.

There they paused.

Cool John knew that it was not likely that any other person was on hand to watch them, since Nutter had been doing that service.

"That was a close shave, Big Bay," the sport declared. "But we are on top of the heap yet, if we can only stay there, and now we must get into our disguises as soon as possible."

He had briefly told what he had seen and heard.

"You bet," was the eager response. "They will leave the house in a jiffy, no doubt, and ten to one each of 'em will strike out in a different direction, to puzzle anybody that tries to follow 'em. What is goin' to be done? Hang me ef this ain't one of the times when a feller wants brains!"

At that moment an empty cab came along down the street, and the Sport of the Steady Hand signaled the driver to stop.

Finding that the cab was not engaged, the Wild West sport handed the driver a five-dollar coin, giving him some careful directions, after which he and his ally got into the vehicle, and the driver, turning into the other street—that upon which the house was situated—drew in to the curb and stopped.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE HOUNDS THROWN OFF.

COOL JOHN and pard, as soon as they were within the cab, proceeded to put on disguises.

They had provided themselves with various articles, preparatory for such an emergency as this, and now those articles came right into play.

The Man of Sand put on a pair of side-whiskers and a mustache, which he adjusted with the aid of a small looking-glass, and then he helped the Big Bay to put on a full gray beard.

Not only so, but the Big Bay was further fixed out with a pair of spectacles, and the sport with a little strip of black court-plaster across his nose.

The change in their looks was remarkable.

They had barely done when the cab started, and the driver gave an agreed-upon signal.

Cool John looked out, in the direction of the house, and saw a woman walking rapidly up the street, and he knew who it was at sight.

It was Ann Spader.

"That is the way it is going to be worked, eh?" he said.

"She is goin' alone, eh?" observed the Big Bay. "I s'pose the others will lay low for us."

"Not a doubt of it, old horse, but that house will know us no more forever, or at any rate it is not likely that it will. We were paid in advance."

"Good plan; leaves us free at any minute."

"You are right."

"Now, if ther driver will only keep her in sight."

"He will do that, never fear. He is a bright fellow, and the promise of extra reward will spur him on."

And thus they talked, while the cab rolled leisurely on.

But let us return to the house.

A plan had been hurriedly arranged, and the woman had left her room and tiptoed down the stairs with all the silence that the two pards out of the West had observed, and thus out of the house.

Her room was so located that the street could not be seen from the windows, but the two rascals watched the door of the front room to make sure that the sport and his pard did not detect the woman in her flight, little thinking that they had already departed.

When she had passed out, they softly closed the door.

"Now, what is going to be done?" demanded Henry King.

"That is the question," the other responded.

"How in the name of wonders did they get after this woman? That is what puzzles me."

"Don't you think it possible that they came here by chance, and that they know nothing about her?"

"It is possible, but we dare not trust to that."

"Of course not; but how could they know anything about her, or connect her with the affair?"

Both were silent.

"They have got to die," grimly declared Henry King, after a few minutes of reflection.

"That has been decided upon from the first, I believe."

"It is more than ever decided, now. Nothing must stand in the way of carrying out the sentence, somehow. We have fooled about long enough."

"There has been mighty little fooling done, on our part. We meant well in every move, but it seems this dare-devil of a sport has the nerve and the luck of the Old Boy himself."

"Not too loud; they may hear you."

"They couldn't hear me through that wall, speaking in this tone."

"Well, are we going to stay here?"

"I am at loss what to do."

"They can't know we are here."

"It is not likely, and yet they must know it, if they are here on business."

"They are mighty still, whatever they are doing. I don't like the appearance of things. Can't we leave by a back way?"

"Yes, if we take our chances about getting through some house and out upon the opposite street."

"Then let's do it, by all means. We must keep out of danger."

They thought again.

"Still, I hate this running away," complained Henry King. "Curse them! If we could only get into their room and finish them off, it would—"

"Be the worst thing we could possibly do," interrupted the other. "There must be a mystery about the manner of their taking off, and no possible chance for a clue."

"Couldn't it be done that way here?"

"What about the woman? Suspicion would attach to her immediately, now that she has gone, and the whole thing would be brought out. It is not to be thought of, Henry."

"You are right. Besides, it would be impossible anyhow. I had as lief go into the den of a couple of Bengal tigers."

"Me, too."

Their other plan was fixed upon.

Leaving the room as silently as the woman had done, they went below and made their way to a back door.

This they opened, and were just passing out when the landlady of the house espied them, and as no boarders had any occasion for using that door, she mistook them for thieves.

"Help! Police! Thieves!"

So she cried out, at top of her voice, and immediately every person in the house made haste to learn what was the matter.

"Be calm, woman!" cried Henry. "Don't you know me? I am Miss Spader's brother. This is my friend."

"Goodness me!" the landlady cried. "What are you doing here?"

"We were merely going out the rear way, to see if we could get through to the other street, to decide a bet."

"I hope you are telling the truth—"

"Madam! can you doubt me?"

The other boarders, the members of the family, and the servants, were now all rushing to the spot.

"Where is Miss Spader?" the woman asked.

"She has gone out," answered Nutter, feeling himself breaking out in perspiration. "See what a scene you have created, madam."

"And why not?" the woman cried. "Think you that I'm goin' to allow men to come and go in and out the rear doors of my house, and not know what they mean by it? I guess not!"

"Have 'em locked up!" cried the old lady from Vairmount. "No tellin' what they have been up tew. Where is Mr. Green an' his son?"

"They must be out," said the landlady.

"I assure you, madam, that it is all right," urged Henry King, earnestly.

"How do I know that it is all right, though? It may be all wrong, for what I can tell."

"We will remain here till Miss Spader comes, if that will satisfy you. Or, if you are determined to do it, call in the police and hand us over. Either that, or let us go."

Inwardly, the two fellows were fiercely cursing.

"I would call down Mr. Green, or his boy, if they are in their room," advised the old lady from Vairmount.

"That is what I will do," decided the landlady. "Mary, you go up and ask one or both of them to come right down here. Your actions are too queer, men, to suit my taste."

"You may as well call in a policeman," urged Henry King. "There is no need of any trouble, I assure you."

"You wait a minute, first."

The rascals were in a dilemma, truly.

They did not dare to make a break for liberty, for that would bring a hue and cry at their heels and their arrest would be certain.

Nor did they care about facing Cool John and his burly pard. They hoped, by putting on a bold front, to be allowed to go away quietly. And to Henry King, who was known, it was particularly galling.

Meantime, the servant was heard to knock, but there was no response, and at length she came down.

"They are both out," she reported. "And so is Miss Spader."

"We told you she was out," urged Nutter.

It was news to them to learn that the sport and his friend had taken their leave, too.

After some further parley, in which the fellows began loudly to demand that a policeman be called, they were allowed to go, and they lost no time in going.

And as they walked away from the house they applied complimentary names to each other for the foolish thing they had undertaken, and tried to ponder out what had become of the Western comrades.

At length it dawned upon them that they had been given the slip, and that they had once more lost the trail.

And realizing that, they cursed roundly.

CHAPTER XXXV.

RIGHT TO THE POINT.

MEANWHILE, the cab had followed the woman.

Once or twice she had looked back, to see if any one was following her, but seeing no one, she seemed reassured.

She slackened her pace somewhat, in order not to attract notice, apparently, and so continued on to her destination, a respectable-looking house on a respectable street.

There she rung the bell.

The door was soon opened to her, and she entered, and the cab drew up on the opposite side of the street and stopped.

Cool John and his pard made note of the number and street, and waited patiently to see if the woman would come out again, but at the end of half an hour she was still within.

"Well, she has come to stay," remarked the Man of Sand.

"I opine you are right, pard," was the response.

Cool John gave a signal, and the cab moved away, and when it had gone around the corner, stopped.

The driver got down and opened the door.

"Well, was that done all right, boss?" he asked.

But even as he asked it he gave a start of surprise. He stared at his two fares as if they had risen from the dead.

Indeed, had they been old acquaintances, long since departed, he could not have shown greater astonishment. These were certainly not the two men who had gotten into his vehicle.

Cool John had to laugh.

"Yes, you did excellently," he complimented the man. "I see you are amazed at the change in our appearance, but it is all right."

"Yes, now I know your voice, sir. What next on the bill?"

"You do not know who lives in that house, of course."

"You are right when you say that."

"Could you find out?"

"I can try, sir."

"If you can ascertain, without exciting suspicion, I will— But, on second thought, I will attend to it myself."

"Then you are done with me?"

"Yes; and here is the promised reward. Now, I want your name and address, so I will know where to find you if I should want any further services of this kind performed."

The man gave the information, willingly.

Cool John and his pard then alighted from his conveyance and he drove off.

"What now?" demanded the Big Bay.

"To find out about that house."

"Good enough, pardner; what kin I do?"

"You walk down that side of the street to the next corner, and there wait, and I will soon join you."

"Kerreck."

So they set out, one on one side of the street and the other opposite, and Cool John stopped at the house while the Big Bay went on without even looking in that direction.

The Man of Sand rung the bell.

It was soon answered.

"Does Mrs. Burton Predmore live here?" he asked.

"No, sir," was the answer.

"Indeed! Isn't this No. —?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, that is very strange. May I ask who does live here? Is this a private house?"

"It is, sir. A Mrs. King lives here."

Cool John could hardly repress a start, man of nerve though he was.

"A Mrs. King?" he repeated.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, there is no likeness between the names. Can it be possible that I have made a mistake? Perhaps Mrs. King takes lodgers—"

"Indeed, sir, she does not!"

"Merely a guess. I was directed to this number, as plainly as could be. It is possible that Mrs. Predmore did live here—"

"Not for a dozen years, sir. Mrs. King and her son live here, and that is all, sir."

"Isn't this East —th street?"

"Indeed, no! This is West."

"Oh! a thousand pardons; I have made a blunder."

And with that clever excuse the detective descended the steps and went off, and the girl closed the door.

When he rejoined the Big Bay at the corner, he grabbed his hand.

"What luck?" the Big Bay demanded.

"The richest!" was the exclaimed answer.

"So?"

"Yes; jabbed the pick right into the finest kind of a vein."

"Yer don't say!"

"Yes I do, though, and we have got the bulge on this case, now, if nothing happens to down us."

"An' we must look out fer that."

"We'll try to."

"But, what have ye found?"

"I'll tell you as we go along."

"And where are ye goin'?"

"We'll go now and pay our respects to Mr. Abner White."

"Good enough, fer it is high time that we looked after that p'izen galoot of a Paul Batford."

"Come along, then."

They set forward, and as they went along Cool John told what he had learned.

He had previously, while they were waiting in the cab, given his ally all the particulars of the morning's work.

"We have got 'em, sure enough," the Big Bay cried.

"Yes, if we play it right, now, and they do not get the drop on us somehow and knock us out."

But, there was still much work to be done.

We have stated that they had been all along paying some attention to the house into which they had seen Paul Batford disappear.

They had learned who lived there, and the character of the man, and were satisfied that Batford was still there, though why he was there was a mystery to them. It was their intention to solve it.

In due time they reached their destination.

They were still in their disguise, and the Man of Sand rung the bell, which was soon answered.

"Mr. Abner White at home?" he asked.

"He is, sir."

"I desire to see him."

"Your name?"

"We are strangers to him, but our names is Green; Mr. John Green and son."

"Step into this room, please."

They obeyed, and the servant went to announce their presence.

In a few minutes Abner White came in, his countenance bright, and invited them to be seated.

"We have called upon a little matter of business, sir," Cool John opened the matter.

"Very well, sir, please to state it."

"You have a gentleman stopping here with you, I believe."

"I have a guest in my house."

"His name is Paul Batford."

"It is."

"He is recently from Denver, I believe."

"Before we go any further, gentlemen, let me ask you the nature of your business with Mr. Batford."

"Well, that is right to the point, and not to be avoided, sir," said the Man of Sand.

"We are here to arrest him for the murder of Philip King. We are from Denver."

"Have you proof that this man is guilty?"

"We have not, sir, but we hope through him to reach the guilty person. We know that he knows something about the matter, and we have tracked him to this house. Your question was to the point, and so has my answer been. Now, Mr. White, what will you do in the matter?"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CLOSING THE CIRCLE.

IMAGINE the dilemma in which Abner White was placed.

We have had a faint glimpse of the character of the man; he was a good man in every sense of the word.

Here, beneath his roof, was harbored a wolf in sheep's clothing, whose pretense of repentance had won the favor and sympathy of his would-be benefactor, who desired to shield him.

And not only for himself, but, what was more important, for the sake of his own sister who had come to him in her hour of dire distress. By giving up Batford, he invited the arrest of Myra King. Perhaps these officers did not know of her presence in the house.

Listening at the door was Paul Batford,

his face excited, and his breathing hard but suppressed.

He was in the rear room adjoining

For some moments Abner White was silent, while he gathered himself together for the emergency.

"Are you aware who Paul Batford is, gentlemen?" he asked.

"We know that he is a rascal, whose reputation in the city of Denver is not savory," answered Cool John.

"Do you know who I am?"

"Your name is Abner White, and we have learned that you are a man of truth, honor and good works. It was a surprise to find a man of such character in your house, sir."

"I aim to be such a man as you mention, sir," said Mr. White. "This man Batford is my nephew; that will explain why he is here. I have it upon his word of honor that he neither committed that Denver murder himself, nor knows who did the deed. He is innocent."

"You believe that."

"I do."

"Well, we hope he is, for your sake, sir, and we have no proof to the contrary; but, he must tell what he knows."

"How do you know that he knows anything?"

"How did we learn that he is here? That comes within our line of business, Mr. White."

"Yes, I suppose so. You believe that I am dealing fairly with you, and that I would not knowingly tell you an untruth, not even to shield this man?"

"We believe that, Mr. White."

"Thank you. Now, will you deal as openly with me?"

"We will, sir."

"It is enough. I suppose you have your search warrant, and also a warrant of arrest for my nephew, so that it would be useless for me to deny that he is here, even were I inclined to do so."

"Cursed fool!" grated the listening rascal.

"We have no warrant to search your house, sir," the Man of Sand answered, "but as to the arrest, we intend to make arrests wherever necessary in the pushing of this case. Perhaps an interview with this man would be satisfactory, so that his arrest would not follow."

"You could not take him from my house without a warrant, anyhow; I would forbid it. As to an interview, that must be for him to decide, inasmuch as you have no real authority to demand it at present. This action I take, believing him to be entirely innocent of any part in the crime, gentlemen."

Cool John felt that he was getting worsted.

It was a new experience for him, to deal with a man like Abner White. He was disarmed, as it were.

He had every reason to believe the man was dealing openly with him, as he declared, and he had given his word of honor to do the same in return: He had much rather deal with a rascal.

"You have the advantage of position, sir," he readily admitted.

A smile came over the face of the listening man, and he mentally scored a point for his acknowledged uncle.

But, he also decided that he was too honest by far to prove much of a defense for him, for it would probably be but little trouble for these detectives to get such warrants as were needed.

He took another careful look through the narrow crack between the folding doors, and quietly tiptoed out of the room.

A few seconds later he went out by a rear door.

Meantime, the talk went on.

"What, then, will you do?" asked the philanthropist.

"We could not do much of anything, without using force, and we are not here for that purpose."

"It will not be necessary for you to use force, gentlemen. Procure warrants, and every nook and corner in my house will be opened to you, freely."

"And Paul Batford will be missing."

"It will be as he elects."

"You are frank."

"I am truthful."

"Well, for an interview; will you ask the gentleman if he will see us for a talk?"

"I will, on one condition."

"Name it."

"That you will use no force to take him from my house without a warrant."

"We promise that, sir. We will talk in your presence, freely, and at the end of the interview will go away quietly."

Then it was that Paul Batford was leaving the house.

Mr. White asked to be excused for a moment, and stepping from the room, summoned a servant.

He had left the door of the room open, so that the callers might hear every word that might be said, for he had nothing to conceal from them, in this.

The servant was promptly on hand.

"You will step to Mr. Batford's room," the master directed, "see if he is there, and ask him if he will come down to meet two gentlemen from Denver. Tell him he need not come down if he does not wish to. Tell him my advice is to see them."

"Yes, sir."

The servant ran up the stairs, and Mr. White stepped back again into the room where his callers waited.

"You heard?" he asked.

"Yes," the response.

"And you are satisfied?"

"Perfectly."

A few minutes passed, and the servant came down.

"Mr. Batford is not in his room," she announced.

"See if he is in the house," said the master.

This time several minutes elapsed, and when the servant finally came back the report was the same.

"Is his hat in the hall?" the master asked.

"No, sir."

"You see, he is out," Mr. White then said, turning to the detectives. "I was not aware of it, for I supposed he was in his room. Perhaps you will find him here if you call again; perhaps not."

"It will hardly be necessary to call again, Mr. White."

"You think not?"

"I feel sure of it. You will inform the man that we called, and he will depart in haste."

"He will be free to do so, if he so elect. I intend to deal as openly with him as I have dealt with you. I shall tell him everything immediately he comes in, gentlemen."

"You have no idea where he is?"

"I have not."

"You thought he was in the house when we came in?"

"Yes, I thought he was here; I had not seen him go out. Will you wait awhile for his return?"

"He will not return, Mr. White."

"Not return!"

"It is my opinion that he will not, sir. I believe he has taken the alarm, and has quietly given us the slip."

"I can hardly believe it, sir."

"An honest man yourself, sir, you are too confiding in the profession of the same characteristic in others. You say that you are the uncle of this Paul Batford, I believe."

"Yes."

"Then perhaps you can give us all the information we need, since it will be impossible to see the man himself. He was your sister's child, of course, the name being different from yours. Perhaps he will re-return while we talk, but I very much doubt it."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BATFORD OVERREACHES HIMSELF.

PAUL BATFORD, when he left the house of Abner White, by the rear way as described, made about the quickest move in his life.

He had previously laid well his plans for such an escape from the house if it ever became necessary for him to do so, and now he put into practice what he had outlined.

He vaulted over the rear board fence into the rear yard of the house fronting on the

other street. From there he leaped into the yard adjoining, and so on until he came to that of the third house to the right, when he ran to the rear door and entered.

This house he knew to be occupied as a saloon on the ground floor, and men frequently passed in and out that rear door.

Once inside the door he moved leisurely.

He passed into the saloon with a cool air, loitered there a few moments, patronized the bar, and went out to the street.

There he took a hasty survey up and down, and seeing nothing to give him alarm, moved away with an easy, careless swing, as if he had nothing to fear and had a clear conscience.

"That was a close shave," he muttered.

"They would have had me, if I had attempted to leave by the front door. Lucky I had planned that way out before, or I would have been in a bad fix. Well, I have worked Old Sanctimonious for all it was worth, and what now?"

He thought.

"That hold is broken, that is sure," he decided. "My only chance now is with my charming half-sister, and I'll see what can be made out of that. If I can make the old man come down handsomely, that will repay me for the trouble I have had. Let me bend my mind to it a little."

And he did.

A smile curled his lip, and he livened his gait.

"That is just the idea," he chuckled to himself, "and that is just the place for the lady. Lucky I thought of it. But it was there and it was bound to come when I put my mind to it. I'll go and see her immediately."

He was presently at the door of a house where he was gladly received.

It is not necessary to enter into any description of the place, further than to say that outwardly it was a house of good appearance.

He made inquiry for the landlady, and was soon in earnest talk with her upon a matter which seemed to be of more than usual importance. Their conversation lasted some time.

At length they seemed to come to an understanding, and Batford took his departure.

He went to one of the avenues not very far away, and there entered the first stationery store he came to and bought some paper and envelopes.

"Will it be possible for me to write a note here?" he asked.

"Why, certainly," he was answered.

Pen and ink were provided, and the fellow spent some time in preparing what he desired.

He crumpled the first and second effort and thrust the paper into a pocket, but the third seemed to suit him better and he folded it and sealed it in an envelope.

This he directed.

Having paid for his purchase, and now thanking for the favor, he went out and sought a messenger.

Ere long he espied a boy who he thought would answer his purpose, and gaining his attention, soon struck a bargain with him and sent him with the missive.

The boy's destination was the house where Rosa King was staying.

The note was for her.

As soon as he delivered it the boy ran away, as he had been directed to do, and that was the last that was seen of him.

Rosa and her friend were together when the note was delivered.

On opening it, an exclamation escaped Rosa's lips, and all the color left her face for an instant.

The next instant the blood mounted to her cheeks and her eyes brightened, and her friend made inquiry as to the nature of the message.

"Listen," said Rosa; and she read aloud:

"DEAR ROSA:—

"By mere chance I have learned where you are, and I would come to you, but I dare not do so—you know why. But I must see you, and so I will arrange a plan. I will send a cab for you, and you will get in without any question, and the driver will bring you safely to me. You must come alone, or he will not bring you at all. I am

still free, and am at work on the case, but I have to be careful. I have a clue to the mystery, and all will be well. I am in need of your help.

With love,

"JOHN."

"And who is John?" asked Miss Dean.

"Why, John Handy, of course, as you must know."

"And he is in hiding?"

"Yes; you know, as I told you, that he broke jail and ran away."

"And how can he have learned that you are here?"

"I do not know."

"And you are going to him?"

"Most assuredly."

"Suppose it is a trap for you?"

"Nonsense! Who would lay a trap for me?"

"I do not know, of course, but that thought came to me."

"No one would do that. If the officers had discovered me, they would come for me. No, it must be all right."

"Well, I hope it is."

"You have misgivings?"

"Yes."

"I see no cause for alarm, Cynthia."

"Do you know your lover's handwriting?"

"This is the first time I have ever seen it."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, for there was no need of our writing; we met occasionally, and that was all."

"Don't you think you had better decline to go, when the cab comes? It will be just as safe for him to come to you as for you to go to him."

"Oh! I don't believe he ever thought of that, Cynthia."

"Then he is [very thoughtless, is all I have got to say about him. No, I will add that he is very selfish as well."

"Cynthia!"

"I mean it. I might say that he is a coward, too."

"Cynthia Dean!"

"I cannot help it; that is just the way it looks to me, and I don't consider him very manly."

Rosa King sprung to her feet and paced the floor, her face aflame, while her friend sat calmly waiting for her to burst forth in anger, or to calm down, and she knew not which it would be.

It was the latter.

"What makes you speak as you do, Cynthia?" Rosa asked.

"Because the tone of this letter has none of the manliness you have ascribed to your lover."

"I did not see it before, but I do see it now. What can it mean?"

"I fear that everything is not as it should be."

"But, who can have sent the note, if not John?"

"And if he did send it he is all that I have said of him, and more. He is not worthy another thought of yours."

"You are severe, Cynthia."

"I am just. He admits that he dare not come to you, and yet he invites you to take a risk he is too cowardly to assume. He is a coward!"

"But, maybe there is another reason—"

"No, he states the reason. He is afraid of arrest, and yet he would expose you to the danger of arrest."

"But, he says he must see me."

"Then let him come and see you, that's all."

"And he needs my help, too. Cynthia, I must go to him."

"You will be foolish if you do. I will tell you what made me suspicious."

"And what was that?"

"Saying that you must come alone."

"I never thought of it that way!"

"It would be far better for me to go with you, for there would be less suspicion, even should any one see you."

"Yes, yes; I believe that you are right, and I am glad that I had you to consult. I begin to have a suspicion myself, now, that all is not right, for this note is not like John's."

"Perhaps he never wrote it."

"But, if not he, then who did write it?"

"You ask too much. But, when will the cab come?"

"He does not say, but I suppose it will be soon. Oh, Cynthia, what am I to do? Perhaps we are wrong."

"And perhaps we are right. I am not going to allow you to run into danger if I can help it. Let us put our heads together, and see if we can't make up a scheme to learn the truth of the matter."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SOME LIGHT DISCOVERED.

ABNER WHITE realized that the Denver detective had him in a close corner, in asking him for information concerning Paul Batford.

The good man had already revealed that Paul was his nephew, and hence Cool John knew that the fellow was a son of Abner White's sister. But he did not know that that sister was Myra King.

It was some moments before Mr. White spoke.

"I foresee," he said, "that if we talk at all we must talk plainly."

"That will suit me better than anything else, sir," assured the Western sport detective.

"And let us have perfect frankness."

"By all means."

"You have revealed to me that you are detectives from Denver, and that you are in search of the murderer of Philip King."

"Exactly."

"You have said that you have no proof that Paul Batford is guilty of the crime."

"We have not."

"And I fully believe him innocent. How you tracked him to my house I know not. That is a secret of your calling. You said that you hope through him to reach the guilty party."

"Yes."

"Have you a suspicion who the guilty one is?"

"There is a suspicion against the banker's wife and against his daughter, to say nothing about the man who escaped from jail."

"What is your own honest opinion?"

"I know, sir, that neither of these did the deed."

Abner White gave a start, and a brightened look came upon his face.

Cool John saw it.

"You say you know that none of these did the deed?" the man repeated, eagerly.

"In my own mind I am convinced of it, sir."

"Then why are you so eager to see Paul Batford?"

"Because I want to get proof of their innocence, in order to get more proof against the guilty wretch."

"You speak the truth?"

"I do, sir, as I promised I would."

"And you want to learn what Paul Batford knows."

"That is it."

"In order to know why Myra King went to him as she did after the crime."

"Exactly."

"Do you know where Myra King is?"

"We do not."

"You are both detectives?"

"Yes."

"You are both agreed upon the belief you have expressed?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"Further, you believe that I know Paul Batford's secret."

"Yes. We do not think you would befriend him without being satisfied of his innocence."

"Even though my nephew?"

"That would make no difference, with a man of your honesty, sir."

"I am glad that you can think it of me. Well, I do know all about Batford, and his connection with the matter."

"And you will tell us?"

"On one condition."

"Name it."

"That you will do all in your power to clear him from suspicion."

Abner White had to deal with care. He kept Batford to the front, but his real concern was for his sister.

"I promise that," said Cool John, promptly. "I work for the innocent as well as against the guilty. To confess the whole

truth, my strongest efforts are to establish the innocence of Rosa King and her mother, and of the man who escaped."

"I admire you for your frankness."

"One could scarcely deal otherwise with a man like yourself."

"Well, I will tell you something about Paul Batford, though I do not promise to tell everything. I will consider about that while I talk."

"Very well."

"Paul Batford was my sister's child, as you have guessed. His father's name was Paul Batford. He is now dead."

"What I now say I say privately; I would not have it made public, if that can be avoided. I approach delicate ground, upon a matter which is properly the secret of two persons."

"We follow you."

"You promise not to make it public if you can avoid it?"

"We promise that."

"It is enough. Paul Batford was a child of shame. My sister ran away from her home— No, no; God help me to tell it aright. She was driven from home, and I myself was the most bitter of all against her."

"She wandered away, her child was born, and for long years nothing was heard of her. We all believed her dead. Not long ago she came to me, poor, broken and wretched and I took her into my house and tried to make reparation for my cruel work in the past."

"Her son had been making himself a burden upon her, and he followed her here. I took him in also, upon his expression of a desire to mend his ways and lead a better life. My sister is still here, but of course you would not desire to see her. I have told you, now, the truth concerning Paul Batford."

"But not the whole truth, Mr. White."

"What more?"

"Why did Mrs. King visit him?"

"She, too, is my sister, gentlemen. She was paying money to Paul Batford, in order to keep the shameful secret from the ears of her husband. Can I tell you more?"

"It is not necessary. You could only add that Mrs. Roger King is the sister of whom you have told me, and that this Paul Batford is her own son. Mr. White, you have as good as established the innocence of that woman by telling me these things. I now see my way clear."

"God aid and direct you in the work, sir."

"Not a doubt but that He will, Mr. White. But I should like to see your sister."

"You will not arrest her?"

"I will not."

"Then I will ask her to come down."

He rose and stepped from the room, presently returning with Myra King.

The woman was pale, but she was calm, and acknowledged introductions by a slight inclination and took a seat.

"My brother has told me that you believe me innocent," she said.

"I know you are innocent, madam," said Cool John. "You are as innocent as I am myself."

"He tells me that you know who did the deed."

"I believe I do."

"Who?"

"That I cannot tell you, now. Do you know where your daughter is, madam?"

"I do not; would to God that I did. I fear that she has taken an unwise course and has run away with her lover."

"I know that such is not the case."

"How do you know it?"

"I will tell you. It were better that you should know just who I am. I am John Handy, the escaped prisoner from Denver."

"Mercy!"

"You said you were a detective," reminded White.

"And so I am, sir; this is not the first case I have handled, by any means. I am here working in my own behalf."

"And you do not know where Rosa is?" cried Mrs. King.

"I do not, madam; you have suspected me wrongly, in thinking that I would elope with her, with a stain upon me."

"Pardon me, then. But, you will endeavor to find her?"

"I shall put forth every effort possible. I assure you. You, on your part, sir and

madam, must keep my secret, as I have been required to give pledge to keep yours."

"You need have no fear sir," spoke up Abner White. "And, as it was my intention to employ a detective myself, I now turn everything over into your hands, and may God speed you in the task before you. There is much work to be accomplished."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

DOUBLY SURPRISED.

WHEN Cool John and the Big Bay left the home of Abner White, they were in high spirits.

It will be remembered that they were in disguise, and so were not likely to be discovered by their enemies under ordinary circumstances.

"Well, what do you think of matters now, Big Bay?" the sport asked.

"What do I think?"

"That was what I asked you."

"I think you are the tallest boss in this hyer town!"

"As you are the biggest, eh? Well, what do you think of the case, then, is what I'm after."

"I think we have got the bulge on it, hard."

"Yes, there is daylight ahead, now."

"And what next?"

"We must see Roger King."

"Will that be safe, d'ye think?"

"Yes, perfectly, disguised as we are, I think."

"All right, then, if you are willin' to take the risk I am."

"Then you think there is a risk?"

"Sartain I do, pard."

"In what way?"

"Why, from them fellers we dumped so nice."

"I see you are forgetting to use good language. Brush up your English a little."

"Pretty hard matter, pard, when it has become chronic, as it has in my case. That is one thing that would give us away, mighty sure."

"The very reason that I want you to take care. But, tell me, how do you imagine those fellows could discover us again, after the neat way in which we have given them the slip?"

"There is only one way, and they must take that way or none."

"And what is it?"

"They know where Roger King is, and they will shadow him, hopin' to get onto you again by so doin'."

"That is just the point, Big Bay. That is the snag in the way, now, and I am glad that you see it the same as I do. Now, what more can we make that will checkmate their game?"

"Don't go to see ther banker."

"But I have got to see him."

"An' ef you go ter see him you will be seen, and if he comes ter see you he will be follered."

"And if you don't drop that Western twang you will be getting into trouble before you know it. Now, I have a scheme in my mind, old horse, and I'll see what you think of it."

They were walking along as they talked.

"What is it?" the Big Bay asked.

"If we separate, and I go to the hotel alone, we will be less likely to be spotted."

"An' then what will become of me?"

The big fellow's exclamation was in such a droll way that Cool John had to laugh.

"I guess nobody will run away with you," he responded. "I was going to say that you could have an eye on the hotel, and shadow anybody who attempts to shadow me when I leave there."

"You have struck et, pard."

"We will agree upon a signal by which you can let me know if I am followed, and together we may capture the fellow."

"That is what we will do, straight away."

They continued on, talking and laying their plans, and finally they parted company.

Cool John made his way to the hotel where Roger King was stopping, keeping a sharp lookout as he entered, to discover an enemy, if one was there.

He saw no suspicious character around. His plan was not to ask for Mr. King at the office, but to engage a room himself, and that he did.

When he had gone to the room, however, he sent a call-boy to see if Mr. King was in his room, and if so, to bid him come at once and see him, sending a card with the token they had agreed upon.

The reader will recall their former interview.

In a few minutes the banker entered the room, but he stopped short with a start.

Cool John smiled.

"It is I, Mr. King," he said. "This is merely a change of attire."

"I'll be hanged if I would have known you if I had fallen over you in the street."

"I think I am pretty well disguised."

"Yes, you are. And, you are the man of all men that I wanted to see!"

"So?"

"Yes; I have got a clue, now."

"And so have I, Mr. King. In fact, I have solved the mystery."

"The deuce you have!"

"I certainly believe that I have, sir. Will you kindly tell me the maiden name of your wife?"

"I told you that, I think; it was Hazmore."

"No, no; your second wife."

"Her name was White."

"Excellent!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that all will yet be well."

"You have found her?"

"I have."

"At the home of Abner White, her brother?"

"Yes. But, how did you, too, get hold of the information? You have somewhat surprised me."

"I have just received a letter from my wife, sent to me at Denver and forwarded from there."

"Ah! then you know—"

"I know all about it, sir."

"And what are you going to do?"

"I am going to forgive the wrong."

"Noble man! She has been more than punished, for her secret has been like a gall-ing canker to her heart."

"And for twenty years she has been a devoted wife and mother to me and my two children, Philip and Rosa. I would be both a knave and fool not to forgive her. I have already done so."

"Then you have communicated with her?"

"No; I mean in my heart."

"I am glad to know it, sir. And now—"

"There is one thing I must ask of you, sir."

"And what is that?"

"That this thing may be kept secret, if that be possible."

"It shall not be made known, if possible to prevent. The only one we have to fear, really, is Paul Batford."

"And there must be a way found to scare him out of opening his lips."

"Some way will be found of dealing with him, there is no doubt of that, sir. But, the others. We must move carefully."

"What is the situation?"

Cool John thereupon went over the ground, giving all the particulars necessary for Mr. King to know, and concluded:

"So, the thing is narrowing down, Mr. King. We have now to find your daughter, fix the crime upon the suspected person—if it belong there, and bring the whole affair to a close."

"You overlook one point, sir."

"What is that?" the detective asked.

"The young man who escaped from jail."

"What about him?"

"He must be found, cleared from suspicion, and then I will take his case into consideration."

"Favorably?"

"Yes, if I find him worthy."

"Then, sir, look no further for John Handy, for I am he. I will endeavor to prove myself worthy of your daughter's hand when the right time comes. Since I have your secret, keep you this one of mine, for the time being."

The remainder of their talk needs not to be quoted.

CHAPTER XL.

JUST A LITTLE TOO LATE.

It has been shown that Henry King and Dick Nutter, when they realized that Cool John and the Big Bay had given them the slip, gave vent to their feelings in mad curses.

It galled them to think that the two men out of the West had slipped through their fingers again.

They had expected to overcome them easily, in New York.

"Well, what is to be done?" demanded Nutter, savagely.

"Something has to be done, and that immediately," grated King.

"If we don't down them, they are going to do it for us. No telling what they have got hold of."

"We'll down them, curse them, if we have to shoot them on the street and take all the chances of swinging for it."

"Count me out of that, if you please."

"We must go and see Ann, at once," said King.

"What can she do?"

"I don't know, but she has asked the privilege of taking a hand in the game. She may have an idea."

"She has got brain, that is a fact."

"Yes, and nerve, too."

"As she has proved. Come along, and we'll see her."

"We had better see the boys first, though, so as to have them on hand at a moment's notice, if needed."

"Well, maybe you are right, for it is war to the teeth, now."

They took a car, and ere long were in a disreputable quarter of the great metropolis.

Here they entered a den where they found Gib Wilson, Webb Harker, and others of their sort congregated, patiently waiting for orders.

"Well, what is it?" demanded Gib.

"Another miscarry," growled King. "We want you."

"Well, we are ready and waitin'. What is in the wind now? What's fer us ter do?"

"It is not certain what there will be to do, but we want you and Webb to come with us so that you can be on hand for whatever may turn up. We mean business this time, hard."

"It seems to be a hard job to handle."

"That is the way it begins to look, true enough."

"And where are you goin'? We will look out o' place on Fifth."

King mentioned the place to which they intended going, and outlined what was required of the ruffians.

This accomplished, he and Nutter left the place, Wilson and Harker following them, and the first mentioned made their way to the house where Ann Spader had taken refuge.

Had they been earlier they would have encountered their prey right there, as we have seen.

Henry King entered.

Nutter remained without, and the ruffians were a little distance away.

Villain King entered a room where his mother and the woman Spader were sitting, and he found his mother somewhat excited:

"What has happened again?" she demanded.

"That is just the trouble, nothing has happened," was the growled response.

"Didn't you get them?" asked the woman Spader. "They were in their room, and you could not miss them."

"They were not in the room at all," answered Henry.

"Not in the room!"

"They had left even before you went out of the house, I suspect, and where they are is a mystery."

"I am afraid there is trouble ahead," spoke up Irene King. "I think you had better get away from here as quickly as possible, young woman. I cannot afford to run the risk of getting mixed up in anything."

"I will go, madam, don't worry."

"Yes, I want you to help us," said Henry.

"You said you would do that if you could."

"What can I do?"

"I want you to help me think what there is that can be done, and then lend me your help in carrying it out."

"Of course I will do that, if the danger is not too great. I have got to look out for myself, you know. Still, I am in it and I will see it to the end, if you will stand by me."

"We'll stand by you, certainly. Dick Nutter is outside, and Gib and Webb are within call."

"I don't want their help."

"They will come in handy, if anything slips."

"Yes, no harm done by letting them keep in sight, I suppose, if they would stand to the scratch."

"They will do that. They are like chained tigers, now, eager to get their teeth into those accursed fellows from the West. And heavens help them when they do get at them!"

"If they do," muttered Mrs. King.

"They will, mother."

"If the men from the West do not get at them first."

"That will be impossible. They are only two against the gang, you see, and we can do them up."

They were only two upon another occasion of which I have recollection, but they seemed equal to a score and two, according to the account you gave me of what took place."

"Enough of that. What can we do, Ann?"

"Where can you get on track of them again?"

"That is the mischief of it. That is what I want you to help me think out."

"Well, then, think instead of talking. You got on track of them before at the hospital, didn't you?"

"Yes; but they won't let us do it again."

"Not likely. Then, that detective went to see Roger King, at the hotel."

"Exactly; but he will not be likely to go there again, either. If you can see a way you are smarter than I am."

"I think I can."

"What is it?"

"I will shadow Roger King."

"What good will that do?"

"If the detective does not come to him, he will go to the detective."

"Ha! why didn't I think of that? That is just the idea, Ann, and it must be carried out just as soon as possible."

"And you must let me work it my own way."

"Certainly."

"You and Dick, and the rest, can keep me in sight, but you must not interfere with anything unless I signal you to do so, or unless you see things going decidedly against me."

"Just as you say. You are the best man of the lot, I believe."

"It would have been better if you had allowed her to entrap the fellows in the first instance," reminded Mrs. King.

"I believe it, now. But, who would have thought that they could get away with us like they did?"

"Well, I will take up my work at once," said the woman.

"Yes, the sooner the better."

"And, you must not come here again," said Mrs. King. "There must be no suspicion against this house. You will not be admitted if you do come."

"She will be admitted if she comes with me," spoke up Henry. "You are not the only one who has an interest in this thing, mother. But, we will not trouble you with our presence unless it is safe to do so."

Ann Spader had risen and was making ready for the street.

"You must not forget that everything depends on me," the mother of the villain reminded.

"And that you depended on us," retorted the son. "We opened the way, and if anything happens we have got to sink or swim together; no use thinking about it in any other way."

"All the more reason why you should make no further botch of the business."

"There shall be no botch work this time."

A few words further, and they left the house.

Dick Nutter signaled that everything was right; that no one was on hand watching.

For a little distance Henry King and the woman walked together, earnestly in conver-

sation, and then they parted company and the woman went on alone.

She went straight to the hotel where Roger King was stopping.

The others went near enough to be of service, and then began their vigil.

But, they were too late, for the interview between the banker and the detective having been concluded, both had taken leave of the hotel.

The Big Bay, however, was on hand, as the banker had barely gone when the villainous crew arrived, and had they been but a few moments later, the Big Bay, too, would have been gone.

CHAPTER XL.

NOT DOWN ON THE BILLS.

PAUL BATFORD having carried his scheme along so far, all that remained for him to do was to engage a vehicle and entrap his prey.

He had counted all upon Rosa King's love for Cool John, and upon her confiding nature, for of course he had an opportunity to learn something about the young lady, through the mother.

His messenger came back to him and reported that he had delivered the note at the proper address, and Batford rubbed his hands with satisfaction.

"It works well," he chuckled. "Now for a cab, if I can find a fellow who is not too squeamish."

But, would it be necessary for him to let his cabman into the whole?

He thought not.

Still, he would have to tell him enough so that he could be depended upon to do his part and do it well.

He was on the point of making inquiry concerning some cab-stand, when he saw an empty vehicle coming toward him along the street, and when it came up he hailed it.

The driver pulled in and stopped.

"Engaged?" asked Batford.

"No."

"Can you undertake a job for me?"

"Well, sir, that depends."

"Yes, I suppose it does."

"What is the job?"

"I suppose you mean it depends on the size of the pay, eh?"

"Yes, I mean that, too, of course. I am out for big fares to-day, no mistake about that part."

"Well, what else, then?"

"Is the job straight?"

"Perfectly."

"Because if it ain't, I don't want anything to do with it."

"Oh, it is all right, and even if it wasn't there would be no danger of your slipping up."

"No?"

"Not a bit."

"Well, what is it?"

"I want you to go to a certain place, get a young lady, and take her to a certain other place."

"That is simple enough."

"Certainly, and perfectly honest."

"She will go willingly?"

"Of course."

"Well, I am your man, then, for money."

"How much do you want?"

"What will ye give?"

"Five dollars."

"All right, so let it be."

"I'll give you two dollars down, and the balance when the work is done."

"All right, let's see your money."

"Here it is."

"Good enough. Get in."

"But I am not going with you; you go alone."

"Oh!"

"And I want you to carry it out well. The girl may ask you some questions."

"What if she does?"

"You must know how to answer them."

"I see."

"Perhaps she will simply get in and say nothing."

"What if she does that?"

"You will take her straight to No. — street."

"I see."

"And if she asks you any questions, then you must use a level head. Do you understand?"

"I guess so."

"She may ask who sent you."

"Exactly."

"And in that case you will tell her it was a young man, good-looking, with black eyes and black mustache."

"That will be easy."

"And that is all you are to know."

"All right."

"No matter how much she asks, that is all you can tell her."

"Just so."

"And appear rather in haste and independent. Tell her to come or stay, just as she pleases—"

"That you say so?"

"No, no; you say that on your own account. Don't you understand?"

"Yes, now that you have told me, I do."

"And, she must come alone."

"Oh-ho!"

"What's the matter?"

"It looks like a little trap, don't it?"

"No trap about it. You just do what you are told to do, and that is all that you will have to do."

"And if she don't come, then leave her?"

"Yes. But, she will come fast enough, I think."

"And if she don't come, no more pay?"

"Of course not; I pay you to do the whole job."

"And how will you know whether I have gone there or not, if she don't come?"

"I want you to come to the address and tell me. You won't forget the street and number, will you?"

"That will cost you a half a dollar more."

"Well, so be it. Now, do we understand each other, my man?"

"I think so. If I bring the girl, then I am to have three dollars more. If not, half a dollar."

"That is straight. Be off with you, now, and serve me the best you can. I may make it even better than I promise, if you are quick and prompt about it. I'll be at the place when you come."

"All right."

The cabby drove off, and Batford continued on his way.

In due time the cabman was at the house, and he ran up the steps and rung the bell.

The door was soon opened.

"Is the young lady ready?" he asked.

"She will be ready in a minute, sir," was the prompt response.

The cabby chuckled to himself, to think how little trouble he was going to have.

He returned to his cab and waited.

The door soon opened again, and a woman came out, clad in black and wearing a veil. She stopped to question the driver.

"You have the address?" she asked.

"Yes, miss."

"Where is it?"

"No. — street."

"And who was it sent you for me?"

"A good-lookin' fellow, black eyes and mustache."

"And he is waiting for me now?"

"Yes, ma'm."

"And did he say that I must come alone?"

"That was the condition, I believe."

"And you will not allow me to take a friend with me?"

"Cannot possibly do it. Come, make haste, for time is money with me, young lady."

"Why did he not come to me?"

"You will have to ask him that. Come, are you going or not?"

"I am going, of course. You need not be impertinent about it. I wanted to be sure."

"Scuse me."

The young woman got into the cab, the driver closed the door and sprung to his place, and the vehicle rattled away.

The next moment a card fluttered from the cab to the pavement, and a young man running down the steps from the house picked it up and glanced at it.

Having done so, he followed the cab.

CHAPTER XLII.

PREPARING A SURPRISE.

COOL JOHN had a clue.

It was one that must be followed, too, while it was possible.

That clue was, the water marked paper upon which the note had been written to Roger King, from New York.

Now that he had heard Roger King's story, suspicion turned against his wife, that

is to say, the first wife, and he decided to pay her a visit, taking the risk upon himself.

He would do this before returning to Abner White's.

There was no haste for his return there, since Banker King was going there to answer in person the letter he had received from his wife, Myra.

But, there was one thing he had to consider.

Should he carry with him a warrant for the arrest of the woman and her son, as well as for Ann Spader?

He decided not.

In the first place, he had no direct proof against them, that he could get a warrant upon without revealing too much of his own plans.

But the woman Spader he meant to have at any hazard, and he must have a warrant for her and a search warrant for the house. This last was fully as important as the warrant of arrest.

Hunting up a justice, he made known his errand.

He gave his name, saying he was a detective, showing such proofs as he could, and in due time was armed with the papers.

With these he set forward immediately for the residence of Irene King.

He had now laid off his disguise.

It was quite a distance to his destination, and he stopped at a corner to await the coming of a car.

While he stood there, whom should he see coming along, but his friend, the cabby, the fellow who had aided him, not a great while before, as has been set forth, and he signaled.

The man motioned that he had a fare inside.

But, that did not matter, for he slackened his pace and drew in to the curb to speak.

So generous a customer was not to be slighted; perhaps he had other work for him to do. This was a fat day for this particular cabby.

He had seen Cool John both with disguise and without, as we know, and knew him the moment he set eyes upon him.

He drew rein and stopped.

As he did so a face appeared at the window of the cab, and Cool John gave a start.

It was the face of Rosa King!

To the amazement of the driver, Cool John sprang forward and opened the door of the cab.

"Rosa!" he cried.

"Heavens! You, John?"

"Yes, it is I. I have been distressed to know where you could be."

"And I have been anxious to learn of your whereabouts. But, it was so odd, your sending for me, and I hardly knew—"

"My sending for you?"

"Did you not write for me to come to you?"

"No; I did not know where you were; I meet you here by merest chance."

"Here, read this note, then, and say what you think of it," and she thrust upon him the note she had received.

"I never wrote it," he declared again. "You ought to have known I did not write it, Rosa."

"Why?"

"Does it sound like me?"

"No, we discovered that it did not, when we studied it well."

"Whom do you mean?"

"My friend, where I am staying."

"Then why are you here?"

"I am protected."

"Ha!"

"The brother of my friend, Frank Dean, is following this cab—yes, yonder he is, now."

"And you were bold enough to venture?"

"As you see. I thought possibly it might be you, though I did not believe it, and if not, we meant to learn what the scheme was, hoping that by it we might get a clue to the whole mystery."

"Well, well, my little detective sweetheart, you are a bold one, true enough. I will take a hand in this myself."

He looked up at the driver.

"Seems you know my passenger," that fellow said, sheepishly.

"Yes, I know her, my man, and what kind of business is this I find you in? I have been sadly disappointed in you, sir."

The fellow looked sheepish enough.

"I didn't know anything was wrong," he faltered; "the feller said everything was all regular."

"You knew well enough it was not, when such a scheme was being carried out. You have got to redeem yourself, or I will make it my business to run you in."

The man paled.

"Don't do that, boss," he implored.

"Well, then, will you aid me against the fellow who sent you?"

"Yes, yes, I'll do that, I swear I will."

"Good enough. If you do, I will not only not arrest you, but I will pay you well besides."

"I'm your man, sure enough."

"All right. Rosa, motion to your friend to come up, and introduce me."

Rosa leaned out of the cab and made a signal, and the man who had been following the cab came running up.

She introduced them.

The time had come when Cool John could sail under his own colors.

"I am pleased to know you, sir," cried Frank Dean, "and that this lady has found a true friend at last."

"I am sure she had true friends here," said Cool John. "But we must carry out the work you have so well begun. You and I must go to that house first, and be on hand."

"The cab will beat us there."

"No, the cabman will take a little longer in reaching there."

"Anything in the world you say, gentlemen," the cabman promised. "I am for you, tooth and nail."

"Have you any idea who the enemy can be?" asked Rosa.

"Yes, I have," said Cool John.

"Who?"

"It is Paul Batford."

"Good heavens! Is it possible?"

"Yes. I know all, Rosa; mention no more."

"You have seen mamma?" with an eager cry.

"Yes, I have seen her and your father, too. Both are well and all right."

"Thank God."

"No time to say more, now. I will take you to them as soon as we have made the arrest of this fellow."

"What is the plan?" asked the driver.

"Just what you heard me say," answered John. "You give us time to get to the house first, and when you come let everything be done naturally, so the fellow cannot suspect."

"I understand."

"And you remain there for further service."

"I'll do it, you bet."

"Then we'll be off, and you fail not in your part, or the worse for you. Succeed, and a reward."

"I'll succeed, or bust."

And so they parted company, Cool John feeling certain that Rosa was perfectly safe in the hands of the cabman, now.

Cool John and Frank Dean went straight to the street and number.

On the way the detective had adopted a disguise, stepping into a cigar store to do so.

This was on the corner, and there they made inquiry about the house in question, and, to their alarm, learned of its true character.

With determined minds they went forward, straight to the door, rung the bell, and in a moment were promptly admitted without question. They were on the ground, and now it only remained to carry out their plans.

CHAPTER XLIII.

MAKING A DOUBLE PLAY.

FRANK DEAN was a fellow to Cool John's liking.

He had a fearless face, was muscular, and the glint of his eyes bespoke courage.

They talked with the persons in the house in a trifling way while they waited, and as both were good talkers the time passed quickly.

Nothing had been seen of Paul Batford.

Cool John was near a window, and presently a cab drew up before the house and stopped.

The face of Rosa King was at the window, and Cool John rested his hand upon

the sash of the window where he stood, a signal that he was there.

"Who is this?" he asked.

"Oh, that is a girl coming here to meet a friend," was the careless answer.

"Mighty good-looking girl," the detective declared. "I must get a closer view at her as she comes in."

"Me, too!"

So exclaimed Frank Dean, and they both stepped to the door, which they opened slightly.

Meantime, Rosa had got out of the cab, and now she rung the bell, which was speedily answered by the servant to whom that duty fell.

"Is Mr. Handy here?" Rosa asked.

"Yes, ma'am," was the answer; as it happened, the truth.

"And he is expecting some one?"

"Yes."

"Then please show me to his room immediately."

She had stepped within, now, as had been agreed upon, and the servant led the way upstairs.

When they had reached the upper landing, Cool John and Frank Dean stepped out into the hall, giving a signal for the others to remain quiet, as if it were all a bit of fun.

Rosa, glancing back, saw them; and Cool John signaled her to go on.

He and Frank followed them.

When they reached the top of the stairs a door at the end of the landing had just opened, and a voice bade Rosa enter.

With a couple of quick strides, Cool John and his new ally were right at her back, and she stepped boldly into the room, where a hand seized her and a voice exclaimed:

"I thought that would bring you, my beauty! You are now in my power and nothing short of a ransom from your dad will get you out again. This is to be your home for a time, and if you behave yourself well no harm will come to you; if not—"

The wretch stopped short, his face as pale as death.

Two men had entered the room, one of whom had pointed a revolver straight at his forehead.

"Dog!" was the fierce exclaim. "Release this lady at once!"

"Tricked, by Judas!" cried Batford. "I cave, pardners; let me down easy and you'll never hear from me again."

"Yes, curse you, I'll let you down!" hissed Cool John. "Here, Mr. Dean, put these things on the fellow's wrists, and then we will talk with him and hear what he has to say."

He gave Frank a pair of handcuffs.

These were snapped over the fellow's wrists in a trice.

Batford's forehead was bathed in perspiration, and he was trembling at the knees.

"Won't you let me go?" he begged.

"We'll let you go to prison, yes," assured Cool John.

Meantime, the servant had carried the alarm below that these men were detectives.

There was a great commotion in the house, and the proprietress came hurrying to the scene to proclaim her innocence in any share of the scheme, but Cool John quieted her.

"Silence!" he cried. "Two words, and I'll run you in, too."

"But, I am innocent," protested Batford.

"I defy you to prove anything against me."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Cool John. "You are a greater fool than I took you to be. Let us see just for the fun of it, what you have got in your pockets. Maybe there is something to be learned."

He proceeded to search the fellow, and almost the first thing brought to light were the crumpled notes which he had started to write to Rosa King, as the reader will remember, before he got one to suit him. Had there been no other proof, this were sufficient.

Then, too, some papers of value, bearing the name of Abner White, were found which the rascal had stolen while in his house.

"It is more than enough, my fine fellow," said Cool John. "You will come along with me, if you please. Mr. Dean, will you take Miss King back to your home in the cab?"

"I would not willingly consent to her going anywhere else, sir."

"Very good."

They left the house, and while Frank and Rosa went home in the cab, Cool John took the prisoner to the nearest station.

There he disposed of him in the proper manner, leaving him securely jugged in a station cell, and proceeded immediately to the residence of Irene King, changing his disguise.

He rung the bell, and it was quickly answered.

The same person came to the door as before, but she did not recognize him, and he asked to see Mrs. King.

He gave his name as Barks, a lawyer from Denver.

After a little delay he was shown into the woman's presence, finding her a little pale and anxious.

"Mrs. King?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; I presume you are here regarding the business I have placed in the hands of Lawyer Kredge?"

Cool John jumped to take the cue at once.

"Certainly, madam," he assured. "And, by the way, I have lost his business address. That is one reason why I have come to you immediately on my arrival. Lucky I did not lose yours."

She fell into the trap immediately, and gave the desired information.

"I thank you very much for the information," said Cool John, blandly. "You are, of course, the wife of Roger King, the banker of Denver—"

"His first and only wife, sir," the woman interrupted. "I learned of his whereabouts by the news in the papers, and have begun proceedings against him for the recovery of my rights— But, you know all about it."

Cool John saw it all, now.

"Yes, I know all about it, madam," he said. "But, there is something in the way. Mr. King procured a divorce from you, and his second marriage is legal. There will have to be more removals than that of Philip King before you and your rascally son can—"

"Sir!" leaping to her feet, pale as death, "what do you mean?"

"I mean just what I say, madam," coolly.

"Would you insinuate that I had anything to do with the death of that young man? Why, sir, he was my own child! I knew nothing of it, till I saw it in the papers. And as to the divorce, I was assured that nothing of the kind had been granted, for I have spent much money to find out, and it has taken more than a year—"

"Ah-ha! more than a year, eh? That is all I wanted, madam—"

"That—that was a slip; I mean—"

"Yes, I am aware that it was a slip. You are my prisoner, Irene King. Hold out your hands."

He advanced upon her with a pair of handcuffs, and she uttered a piercing cry and tried to run from the room, but he had her in a moment.

She was but a child in his steel-like grip, and he forced one of her arms through the back of a massive chair and thus handcuffed her, and it would be impossible for her to leave the room.

Servants came running to the room the next moment.

He allowed them to enter, and then cornered them and threatened them with arrest if they moved.

They obeyed him, tremblingly, and his next move was to take from his pocket the letter that had been sent to Banker King, at Denver, signed "Common Sense," and this he held before Mrs. King's eyes.

"This is the clue that brought me here, madam," he said. "You should have had better sense than to write upon paper that your husband used to have in his office. And then, you should have taken more pains to disguise your hand. Why, it was as plain as day!"

It was a bold bluff, but it succeeded.

"Curse my luck!" the woman grated, fiercely. "Providence has been against me. Like a fool, too, I have cut my throat with my own tongue. It is true that we played to get Roger King's fortune, but we did not murder his son; that was done by his wife and daughter!"

"I happen to know better," said the detective, quietly. "It was Ann Spader who killed him."

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE BIG BAY'S BIG PLAY.

LET us return now to the Big Bay.

We left him at the hotel, or near it, watching Ann Spader, Henry King, Dick Nutter, and the rest.

The big fellow smiled to himself as he thought how useless was their vigil, and he tried to think of some plan by which he could turn the tables upon them. He bent his mind to it.

He was not quick, but he was solid.

Presently it flashed upon him, and he smiled as the thought struck him.

The plan was one that meant some risk to himself, but he was willing to take his chances in the matter.

He would expose himself to their detection, and would then let them follow him and lead them into a trap of his own setting. And he felt that he could make it work.

He knew it was Cool John's plan to go to the residence of Irene King.

He would go there, and he might lead the rascals right into his partner's hands.

If not that, he felt that he could hold them there till Cool John arrived. Or, if he got the worst of it, he could look for help from Cool John.

His mind made up, he put it into execution.

Removing his disguise, far as possible, he went forward to the hotel and entered.

It took him but a few seconds to find that he had been sighted, and that the eyes of the whole evil five were upon him, and he played well his part.

Inquiring for Roger King, he learned that he was not in, and of course, the rascals got the same information, and when the Big Bay sauntered out, they followed him, every one.

He appeared to pay no attention.

On their part, they thought they had a sure thing.

They believed the big fellow would lead them straight to where his partner was.

And in that they were not mistaken, for such a scheme was in the Big Bay's mind, as we have seen. And so they proceeded, each party confident.

What was the amazement of the rascals, finally, however, when the burly Westerner led them straight to the door of Irene King's house, and there pulled the bell, they watching him.

"What in thunder does it mean?" cried Nutter.

"Hang me if I know," answered Henry King, somewhat pale. "It will mean his death, if we can trap him there."

"But, had we better risk it?" questioned the woman.

"Everything depends on it," urged Henry. "We are five here, and mother and the servants are there—we are sure to win!"

"Go on then."

The door had now been opened, and the Big Bay had stepped within.

Cool John had locked all the servants in a capacious closet, and it was he in person who opened the door.

He was surprised.

"Git out both yer guns!" cried Big Bay. "Ther hull durn pack aire at my heels, an' I hev decoyed 'em right hyer."

"That was a big risk, Big Bay."

"No matter 'bout that. I kalkylated that I was good fer half a dozen or so of 'em, ef I didn't find you hyer."

"Well, come right into this room, then, and we will let them come in, and it will be their capture or our lives, one or the other. But no, that will not do; wait a minute."

Cool John ran and secured the doors leading out of the hall, and came back at once.

"You take your place there at the foot of the stairs," he directed. "Appear as if you have no weapons in hand. I'll leave the door ajar, and will stand behind it. When they—"

But there was no time for another word, for they were heard coming up the steps.

The door was tried, flung open, and into the hall rushed the five, drawing their weapons. They came, and glaring around for

the last one came in, Cool John shut the door with his back,

at that instant that he and the

Big Bay were discovered, and oaths were heard.

"Hands up!" cried Cool John, in ringing tones.

"Never!" retorted Gib Wilson, and he raised his arm to fire.

Quicker than light Cool John caught the weapon out of his hand with a bullet, and the Big Bay did the same for Henry King.

They broke and ran at once, thinking only of escape, but to their dismay they found the doors locked, and as Dick Nutter started to run up the stairs, turning to fire as he did so, Cool John brought him down with a bullet in his leg.

The woman was the fiercest of the lot, fighting like a tigress, using mainly her left hand, but she, like the rest, was soon overcome, and all were made prisoners, madly cursing and groaning. And then it was that the two detectives out of the West shook hands.

"Pard, we have got thar," cried the Big Bay.

"You say aright," responded Cool John. "And here is the slayer of Phil King."

He pointed at Ann Spader as he said this, and the woman fairly shrunk from the accusing finger.

"It is a lie, a lie!" she screamed.

"Oh, no, we have got it on you, hard and fast," declared Cool John. "You were seen to do it."

"No, no! You cannot prove it, I defy you to prove it! Why should I want to kill that man, or any one? I tell you it is a lie—a lie! You cannot prove that I killed him!"

"Softly, now," said Cool John, calmly, and in tone to carry conviction. "You were seen to do the deed. What of the man who sprung out of the bushes? Did he not see you in the lightning glare? He is my prisoner, and there is no chance for you in the world."

"Mercy! Have mercy!"

She threw herself upon her knees, raising her shackled hands.

"There is only one chance for you," said Cool John. "By confessing the whole thing you may escape hanging."

"I will do it, I will do it!"

"Fool!" cried Henry King. "keep your head shut, will you?"

"Yes, fool when my love for you led me to take such risks," she retorted. "I was blind."

"Will you keep still?"

"No, I will not! For you I killed Phil King; for you and your mother I took all the risks; for you—"

"Curse you! will you hold your tongue?"

"For you I have stained my soul with blood. You have used me as your tool, but you shall suffer with me. With Philip King out of the way, you expected to come in for the old man's wealth."

"Go on," urged Cool John.

"She lies!" cried Henry King. "We knew nothing about it!"

Cool John laughed lightly, as did also the woman, who was now desperate in her situation.

"Yes, yes, I will tell it all," she cried.

"They engaged me to go to Denver for the purpose of murdering Phil King. I went, and I carried out the scheme. I enticed him, won his confidence, and laid a trap for him."

"On that rainy night I met him in the Phoenix. I made haste to get first to his home, and entered, by the window I had before seen him use, when he was out late. I waited there till he came, when I shot him. The next moment I leaped out and ran off in the darkness."

"And where did you go then?"

"I had already engaged passage for New York, and I was just in time to get the train."

"Much obliged to you," said Cool John.

"That is just the way we have been figuring it out. It might have been a success, if Providence had not been against you."

"Providence and Cool John," added the Big Bay.

"And you," said John.

They took their prisoners into the room where Mrs. King was, and there Cool John left them for the time being in care of the Big Bay.

He went straight to Police Headquarters,

told who he was, gave his story, and conducted a squad of policemen back to the house to get the prisoners, and in due time they were all safely quartered where they deserved to be.

CHAPTER XLV.

CONCLUSION.

MEANWHILE Roger King had gone to the home of Abner White.

He asked first for Mr. White, and when he had explained who he was, asked to see his wife.

The woman came into the room and stood before him with clasped hands and downcast eyes, without speaking, simply awaiting whatever might be decreed by her husband.

The banker put out his hand and touched her, saying:

"Myra?"

"Roger."

Abner White moved quietly out of the room, softly closing the door after him, leaving them alone together.

"Myra, all is forgiven."

"Roger, can it be true that you pardon me?"

He was sitting, and she threw herself upon the floor at his feet, looking up into his face.

"It is true that I pardon you. For twenty years you have been my faithful, devoted wife, and your punishment has already been more than was deserved."

"No, no, I deserved it all, and more. Why do you not spurn me? Why do you not cast me out and so make complete the misery I deserve for the lie I have lived in your presence? Your forgiveness will kill me!"

"I will take the risk of that, Myra. Come back to me, come back to your home, and come back to your place in my heart, and let the past be forgotten."

When Abner White entered the room an hour later he understood.

There had been time sufficient for them to talk over the whole affair, and no shadow was between them now.

The three talked over the matter still more fully, trying to reach some conclusion, but there was still much that they could not understand. They desired the coming of Cool John.

After a time the sport and his burly partner made their appearance.

They told their story, as known to the reader, and that there was great rejoicing can be imagined.

A messenger was sent for Rosa King, and when she came, with her friends, the brother and sister, the happiness of the mother was made complete. The mother and daughter embraced.

Explanations followed.

Much of it all has been made clear to the reader during the progress of the story.

On the night of the crime John Handy had been out to King's place for a clandestine meeting with Rosa, and had been gone but a little while when the crime was committed.

Rosa had taken the locket from his chain while standing in his embrace, and must have dropped it on her return to the house. She had left the house by way of the L window, and had met Handy in the grounds, returning by the same way, which was made use of by all the family, occasionally.

Her first stories had been told to shield her lover. It would never do for her to let it be known that her lover had been there that night, for that might fasten the crime upon him. She could not insist that the locket had been in her possession and not tell the truth about it, for that might throw suspicion upon herself; and, if she told the whole truth, and cleared herself and her lover, suspicion might then fall upon her mother, and she had a dread that she might be the guilty one.

Rosa knew her mother's secret.

There had been little time for the girl to think; she had to decide quickly. She decided to deny all knowledge of the locket, and trust to her lover to clear himself.

As for Cool John, he would not tell the truth for Rosa's sake. He left it all with her. He had rather suffer himself than expose her to arrest. And, then, he could not explain the mystery of the locket, any-

how; and, as Rosa did not clear him, he half feared that she might be guilty, at first.

He loved her too well to place her in jeopardy.

As for Mrs. King, she half feared that her evil son had had a hand in the murder, and she could not expose him to arrest. As Handy was unknown to her, she allowed the suspicion to rest on him. Besides, there was the fear of the exposure that must follow. It can be seen that she was in a dilemma. It had been a terrible matter of mystery all around.

When the case came to trial, all was made plain.

Cool John had by that time done further work upon it, and every point was brought out fully.

The first wife of Roger King had been the prime mover in the matter. She had found out where her former husband was, and had laid out the scheme, with the help of her son.

She had been misled by the report that he had never secured a divorce, and she thought herself still his legal wife. She wanted to remove the younger son, then the father, and she and her son would step in and take the whole property. But she had not reckoned well enough.

Both she and Henry took good care to make possible an *alibi* that could not be shaken, while the woman Spader was absent for the purpose of doing the deed, and in that they were secure, but, events had gone contrary to their designs. Needless to add, in conclusion, that all the guilty ones were punished as they deserved. Paul Batford took his own life.

Who had been to blame for his life, and its ending?

The reader must decide.

Here are depths, full of human interest, to the student who cares to dig deep into the matter; we have barely touched the surface.

And, as the evil ones were punished, so, eventually, the others were rewarded for their good works. And perhaps the happiest of them all was Abner White, whose faith in the overruling of God was unwavering.

Cool John finally married Rosa King, and the question as to his worthiness was settled. He had been a detective in Government employ, working upon a case that made it imperative that his identity should not be revealed to any one. And the Big Bay was his ally.

All returned to Denver, where they settled down to long, happy and useful lives.

Detective Coughlin recovered, and he and Connors are still firm friends. It had not been known to them who John Handy really was, but they had faith in him nevertheless.

It had been a great mystery, a sort of nine days' wonder, as it were, and so it might ever have remained but for the timely work of Cool John and his pard. As to John's escape from jail, the Government had ordered his release, and he had changed clothes in his cell to add to the mystery.

THE END.

- 247 **Alligator Ike**; or, The Secret of the Everglade. By Capt. Fred. Whittaker.
 248 **Montana Nat**, the Lion of Last Chance Camp. By Edward Willett.
 249 **Elephant Tom**, of Durango; or, Your Gold-Dust or Your Life. By Jos. E. Badger, Jr.
 250 **The Rough Riders**; or, Sharp-Eye, the Seminole Scourge. By Buckskin Sam.
 251 **Tiger Dick vs. Iron Despard**; or, Every Man Has His Match. By P. S. Warne.
 252 **The Wall Street Blood**; or, Tick Tick, the Telegraph Girl. By Albert W. Aiken.
 253 **A Yankee Cossack**; or, The Queen of the Nihilists. By Capt. Frederick Whittaker.
 254 **Giant Jake**, the Patrol of the Mountain. By Newton M. Curtis.
 255 **The Pirate Priest**. By Col. P. Ingraham.
 256 **Double Dan**, the Dastard; or, The Pirates of the Pecos. By Buckskin Sam.
 257 **Death-Trap Diggings**; or, A Hard Man from 'Way Back. By Joseph E. Badger, Jr.
 258 **Bullet Head**, the Colorado Bravo. By Captain Mark Wilton.
 259 **Cutlass and Cross**. By Col. P. Ingraham.
 260 **The Masked Mystery**. By A. P. Morris.

- 261 **Black Sam**, the Prairie Thunderbolt; or, The Bandit-Hunters. By Col. Jo Yards.
 262 **Fighting Tom**, the Terror of the Toughs. By Col. Thomas Hoyer Monstery.
 263 **Iron-Armed Abe**, the Hunchback Destroyer. Captain Mark Wilton.
 264 **The Crooked Three**. By Buckskin Sam.
 265 **Old Double-Sword**; or, Pilots and Pirates. By Capt. Fred. Whittaker.
 266 **Leopard Luke**, the King of Horse-Thieves. By Captain Mark Wilton.
 267 **The White Squaw**. By Capt. Mayne Reid.
 268 **Magic Mike**, the Man of Frills; or, Bad Ben's Bad Brigade. By William R. Eyster.
 269 **The Bayou Bravo**. By Buckskin Sam.
 270 **Andros, the Free Rover**; or, The Pirate's Daughter. By Ned Buntline.
 271 **Stonewall, of Big Nugget Bend**; or, Old Ketchum's Tug of War. By Capt. Mark Wilton.
 272 **Seth Slocum**, Railroad Surveyor; or, The Secret of Sitting Bull. By Capt. F. Whittaker.
 273 **Mountain Mose**, the Gorge Outlaw. By Buckskin Sam.
 274 **Flush Fred**, the Mississippi Sport; or, Tough Times in Tennessee. By Ed. Willett.
 275 **The Smuggler Cutter**. By J. D. Conroy.
 276 **Texas Chick**, the Southwest Detective. By Captain Mark Wilton.
 277 **The Saucy Jane, Privateer**. By Capt. Frederick Whittaker.
 278 **Hercules Goldspur**, the Man of the Velvet Hand. By Captain Howard Holmes.
 279 **The Gold-Dragon**. By Wm. H. Manning.
 280 **Black-Hoss Ben**; or, Tiger Dick's Lone Hand. By Philip S. Warne.
 281 **The Sea Owl**. By Col. Prentiss Ingraham.
 282 **The Merciless Marauders**; or, Chaparral Carl's Revenge. By Buckskin Sam.
 283 **Sleek Sam**, the Devil of the Mines; or, The Sons of the Fiery Cross. By Jos. E. Badger, Jr.
 284 **The Three Frigates**; or, Old Ironsides' Revenge. By Capt. Fred. Whittaker.
 285 **Lightning Bolt**, the Canyon Terror; or, The Mountain Cat's Grudge. By Mark Wilton.
 286 **Pistol Johnny**. By Joseph E. Badger, Jr.
 287 **Dandy Dave and His Horse**, White Stocking; or, Ducats or Death. By Buckskin Sam.
 288 **Electro Pete**, the Man of Fire; or, The Wharf Rats of Locust Point. By A. P. Morris.
 289 **Flush Fred's Full Hand**; or, Life and Strife in Louisiana. By Edward Willett.
 290 **The Lost Corvette**; or, Blakeley's Last Cruise. By Capt. Fred. Whittaker.
 291 **Horseshoe Hank**, the Man of Big Luck. By Capt. Mark Wilton.
 292 **Mike Horner**, the Boss Roustabout. By Joseph E. Badger, Jr.
 293 **Stampede Steve**. By Buckskin Sam.
 294 **Broadcloth Burt**, the Denver Dandy. By Captain Howard Holmes.
 295 **Old Cross-Eye**, the Maverick-Hunter. By Capt. Frederick Whittaker.
 296 **Duncan, the Sea-Diver**; or, The Coast Vultures. By George St. George.
 297 **Colorado Rube**, the Strong Arm of Hotspur City. By Wm. H. Manning.
 298 **Logger Lem**; or, Life and Peril in the Pine Woods. By Edward Willett.
 299 **Three of a Kind**. Tiger Dick, Iron Despard, and the Sportive Sport. By P. S. Warne.
 300 **A Sport in Spectacles**. By Wm. R. Eyster.
 301 **Bowdler Bill**; or, The Man from Taos. By Buckskin Sam.
 302 **Faro Saul**, the Handsome Hercules; or, The Grip of Steel. By Joseph E. Badger, Jr.
 303 **Top-Notch Tom**, the Cowboy Outlaw; or, The Satanstown Election. By Capt. Whittaker.
 304 **Texas Jack**, the Prairie Rattler; or, The Queen of the Wild Riders. By Buffalo Bill.
 305 **Silver-Plated Sol**, the Montana Rover. By Capt. Mark Wilton.
 306 **The Roughs of Richmond**; or, The Mystery of the Golden Beetle. By A. P. Morris.
 307 **The Phantom Pirate**. By Col. Ingraham.
 308 **Hemlock Hank**, Tough and True. By Edward Willett.
 309 **Raybold, the Rattling Ranger**. By Buckskin Sam.
 310 **The Marshal of Satanstown**. By Capt. Frederick Whittaker.
 311 **Heavy Haul**, the Relentless. By Captain Mark Wilton.
 312 **Kinkfoot Karl**, the Mountain Scourge; or, Wiping Out the Score. By Morris Redwing.
 313 **Mark Magic, Detective**. By Anthony P. Morris.
 314 **Lafitte**; or, The Pirate of the Gulf. By Prof. J. H. Ingraham.
 315 **Flush Fred's Double**; or, The Squatter's League of Six. By Edward Willett.
 316 **Lafitte's Lieutenant**; or, Theodore, the Child of the Sea. By Prof. J. H. Ingraham.
 317 **Frank Lightfoot**, the Miner Detective; or, Following a Blind Lead. By J. E. Badger.
 318 **The Indian Buccaneer**; or, Red Rovers on Blue Waters. By Col. Prentiss Ingraham.
 319 **Wild Bill**, the Whirlwind of the West. By Buffalo Bill.
 320 **The Gentle Spotter**. By A. W. Aiken.
 321 **California Claude**, the Lone Bandit. By Captain Howard Holmes.
 322 **The Crimson Coyotes**. By Buckskin Sam.
 323 **Hotspur Hugh**; or, The Banded Brothers of the Giant's Arm. By Captain Mark Wilton.
 324 **Old Forked-Lightning**, the Solitary; or, Every Inch a Man. By Jos. E. Badger, Jr.
 325 **The Gentleman Pirate**; or, The Hermit of Casco Bay. By Col. P. Ingraham.
 326 **The Whitest Man in the Mines**; or, The Dog-Town Crowd. By Capt. F. Whittaker.

- 327 **Terrapin Dick**, the Wild Woods Detective. By Edward Willett.
 328 **King Kent**; or, The Bandits of the Bason. By Buckskin Sam.
 329 **The League of Three**; or, Buffalo Bill's Pledge. By Col. Prentiss Ingraham.
 330 **Cop Colt**, the Quaker City Detective. By Chas. Morris.
 331 **Chispa Charley**, the Gold Nugget Sport; or, The Rocky Mountain Masks. By J. E. Badger.
 332 **Spring-Heel Jack**. By Col. Monstery.
 333 **Derringer Deck**, the Man with the Drop. By Wm. R. Eyster.
 334 **The Cipher Detective**. By A. P. Morris.
 335 **Flash Dan**, the Nabob; or, The Blades of Bowie Bar. By Capt. H. Holmes.
 336 **The Magic Ship**. By Col. P. Ingraham.
 337 **Old Gabe**, the Mountain Tramp. By Ed. Willett.
 338 **Jack Sands, Sport**. By Philip S. Warne.
 339 **Spread Eagle Sam**, the Hercules Hide-Hunter. By Joseph E. Badger, Jr.
 340 **Cool Conrad**, the Dakota Detective. By Capt. H. Holmes.
 341 **The Sea Desperado**. By Col. Ingraham.
 342 **Blanco Bill**, the Mustang Monarch. By Buckskin Sam.
 343 **The Head Hunter**; or, Mark Magic in the Mines. By A. P. Morris.
 344 **Double Shot Dave of the Left Hand**. By Wm. R. Eyster.
 345 **Masked Mark**, the Mounted Detective. By Jos. E. Badger, Jr.
 346 **Ocean Guerrillas**; or, The Planter Midshipman. By Col. Prentiss Ingraham.
 347 **Denver Duke**, the Man With 'Sand'; or, Centipede Sam's Lone Hand. By Capt. Howard Holmes.
 348 **Dan Dillon**, King of Crosscut; or, A Woman's Wild Work. By Edward Willett.
 349 **Lion-Hearted Dick**, the Gentleman Road-Agent. By Albert W. Aiken.
 350 **Flash Falcon**, the Society Detective. By Weldon J. Cobb.
 351 **Nor' West Nick**, the Border Detective; or, Dan Brown's Fight for Life. By J. E. Badger.
 352 **The Desperate Dozen**. By Cap. Howard Holmes.
 353 **Barb Brennan**, the Train Wrecker. By John Cuthbert.
 354 **Red Richard**; or, The Brand of the Crimson Cross. By Albert W. Aiken.
 355 **Stormy Steve**, the Mad Athlete. By Jos. E. Badger, Jr.
 356 **Three Handsome Sharps**. By Wm. R. Eyster.
 357 **Jack Simons, Detective**; or, The Wolves of Washington. By A. P. Morris.
 358 **The Prince of Pan-Out**. By Buckskin Sam.
 359 **Yellow Jack**, the Mestizo; or, Tiger Dick to the Rescue. By Philip S. Warne.
 360 **Jumping Jerry**, the Gamecock from Sundown. By Jos. E. Badger, Jr.
 361 **Tombstone Dick**. By Ned Buntline.
 362 **Buffalo Bill's Grip**. By Col. P. Ingraham.
 363 **Crowningshield**, the Sleuth; or, Pitiless as Death. By Albert W. Aiken.
 364 **The Sea Fugitive**. By Col. P. Ingraham.
 365 **Keen Kennard**, the Shasta Shadow; or, The Branded Face. By Capt. Howard Holmes.
 366 **The Telegraph Detective**; or, The Dynamite League. By George Henry Morse.
 367 **A Royal Flush**; or, Dan Brown's Big Game of Freeze-Out. By Jos. E. Badger, Jr.
 368 **The Canyon King**. By Edward Willett.
 369 **The Coast Corsair**. By Col. P. Ingraham.
 370 **The Dusky Detective**. By Albert W. Aiken.
 371 **Gold Buttons**; or, The Up-Range Pards. By Buckskin Sam.
 372 **Captain Crisp**; or, The Man With a Record. By Jos. E. Badger, Jr.
 373 **The Sailor of Fortune**; or, The Buccaneers of Barnegat Bay. By Col. P. Ingraham.
 374 **Major Blister**, the Sport of Two Cities. By Capt. Howard Holmes.
 375 **Royal George**, the Three in One. By Wm. R. Eyster.
 376 **The Black Beards**; or, The High Horse on the Rio Grande. By Albert W. Aiken.
 377 **Afloat and Ashore**; or, The Corsair Conspirator. By Colonel Prentiss Ingraham.
 378 **John Armstrong**, Mechanic; or, From the Bottom to the Top of the Ladder. By Capt. F. Whittaker.
 379 **Howling Jonathan**; or, the Terror from Headwaters. By Jos. E. Badger, Jr.
 380 **The Golden Serpent**; or, Tiger Dick's Pledge. By P. S. Warne. Ready Feb. 8.
 381 **The Gypsy Gentleman**; or, Nick Fox, the Denver Detective. By Albert W. Aiken. Ready Feb. 10.